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METHUEN'S ENGLISH CLASSICS

TENNYSON:
SELECT POEMS

Edited by

W. T. WILLIAMS, M.A.

AND

G. H. VALLINS, B.A.



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INTRODUCTION

1. THE LIFE OF TENNYSON

TENNYSON was born in 1809 at Somersby, a village in the midst of the Lincolnshire wold, that open countryside the quiet beauty of which was to inspire and colour so much of his work. His boyhood was spent at home, and afterwards at Louth Grammar School, which he hated and left early for the more tender mercies of his father's stern, yet just, tuition. When he was nineteen he went up to Cambridge and soon became one of a group of earnest intellectuals, nicknamed 'Apostles', who often

held debate, a band
Of youthful friends, on mind and art,
And labour and the changing mart,
And all the framework of the land.

At Cambridge he entered into a deep and intimate friendship with his fellow-student Arthur Hallam, a friendship made all too brief by Hallam's sudden death at Vienna in 1833. Yet Hallam dead became an even greater inspiration than Hallam living. During the years immediately following his loss Tennyson charged his poetry with a regret for 'a day that is dead', a strong resolution (as in *Ulysses*) for the years to be, and the grave philosophy of life and death which after seventeen years was to have its complete expression in *In Memoriam* (1850). Those were years of growing power and prosperity. The rough treatment by the critics of his poems of 1832, in which had appeared *The Lady of Shalott* and the first version of both *The Lotos-eaters* and

Ænone, silenced him for ten years. But in 1842 he issued a much-revised selection of this early work and a new volume, which included, among other poems, *Ulysses* and the *Morte d'Arthur*. By this time he had become a familiar figure among the literary men of London, including Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray, and Walter Savage Landor. 'One of the finest looking men in the world,' jerked out Carlyle in a letter to Emerson. 'A great shock of rough dusky dark hair ; bright, laughing, hazel eyes ; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate ; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian looking, clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy, smokes infinite tobacco.'

The year 1850 brought a happy settlement for his hitherto somewhat uneasy fortunes. In it *In Memoriam* was published ; the aged Wordsworth died and, mainly through the influence of the Prince Consort, Tennyson reigned as Laureate in his stead and at last he was able to marry Emily Sellwood, after long years of patient waiting. From that time life flowed on easily and pleasantly. He settled down at Farringford, a beautiful house near Freshwater in the Isle of Wight. To Farringford he afterwards added an inland residence, Aldworth, high on the Surrey hills above Haslemere. Between the two he divided his time, when he was not punctuating it with extensive tours on the Continent. At both he kept a half-secluded, half-social state, the acknowledged Laureate not only of the Court but also of the whole nation. New poems came from him at intervals—*Maud*, *Enoch Arden*, songs and poems of English life, a number of historical plays, and the half-epic rendering of the Arthurian legend, which he had experimented with from the earliest years, and now perfected in the *Idylls of the King*. In 1883 the Queen honoured him, and literature, with a peerage, which he lived to enjoy till 1892, when at Aldworth, on the evening of October 6th, he died.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF TENNYSON'S POETRY

Three of the poems printed in this book have their origin in Greek myth, and three in the English Arthurian legend. They represent, therefore, the romantic, as apart from the philosophical, descriptive, and topical, poetry of Tennyson; though, as with nearly all his poems, they are all touched with the characteristic thought of the man and of his age. In essence they are all, except *Ulysses*, narrative poems; but in form they vary from the modified ballad measure of *The Lady of Shalott*, through the varied rhythms of *The Lotos-eaters*, to the reflective blank verse of *The Passing of Arthur*. Though in subject they represent only one aspect of Tennyson's work, they exemplify all the main elements of his style, and his methods as a poet. It is necessary to any real appreciation of the poems to discover the secret of their intrinsic beauty and their appeal to us to-day.

From the outset we must remember that not long after his death Tennyson's fame began to decline. Only in the last few years has he, at least in part, begun to come into his own again. Since he was so much a man of his own age, the age which followed it could not appreciate him. 'I am now convalescent,' wrote Rupert Brooke a few years before the war, 'and can sit up and take a little warm milk-and-Tennyson.' It was a familiar gibe, this hint that Tennyson was the fit companion only for invalids, and a diet for the sickly. In these later years we have become more patient to sift the false from the true, and to re-assess those qualities in his work which, being of the very nature of poetry, are destined to survive the passing of time.

When, therefore, we have admitted that Tennyson's men and women are often like the shadows the Lady of Shalott pictured in her magic web, that his philosophy is sometimes shallow and wavering, that frequently he lacks true virility and power, we have to turn to the good

in him which overmasters these defects. Like Bully Bottom he had 'a reasonable good ear in music'; yet far more than merely reasonable, and not so much for the tongs and the bones as for the sound and harmony of words. Nor was his eye less sensitive than his ear. He could play with a master's touch upon the instrument of his verse—its vowels and consonants, rhythm and rhyme; and he could paint with a cunning hand the colour and form of what he saw, especially in the exquisite detail of Nature or in her vaster panorama. He is, indeed, of all our poets the greatest artist, working with infinite care and subtlety upon his canvas. Nearly all his poems were revised with deliberation and the most painstaking thoroughness. 'Tennyson reads the *Quarterly*,' sighed Browning, 'and does as they bid him with the most solemn face in the world; out goes this, in goes that. All is changed and ranged. Oh me!' This eternal changing and ranging often led him into a diction that depended on artifice rather than on art. Poems that were wrought so long and so patiently tended to have a beauty like Maud's:

Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
Dead perfection, no more.

It is difficult, sometimes, to see behind the wealth of ornament the deeper simplicities that must belong to every true poet. But for the most part in Tennyson ornate expression is, somewhat paradoxically, the natural outcome of his genius; the delicate and wonderful mechanism of his verse is breathed upon by the spirit of poetry. Not always. Inevitably the decoration sometimes becomes mere tinsel. When he writes in *The Passing of Arthur* of King Arthur's curls clotted with blood

Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips,

he succumbs ludicrously to a temptation that was ever present with him—to exalt the diction at the expense of

directness and simplicity. He was, too often, incapable of expressing the familiar and the concrete in language that was simple and unadorned. Even Carlyle, his loyal and admiring friend, talked of 'Alfred's jingle', hinting that he was sometimes the servant and not the master of the music of words. The criticism was true, but it does not touch the essential work of Tennyson. He had to pay the price for his artistry, as Wordsworth did for his simplicity, and Browning for the dynamic onrush of his thought.

At the outset, then, it is worth while to look at the metrical form of the selected poems. Only two of them are in rhymed verse—*The Lotos-eaters* and *The Lady of Shalott*. It is easy to recognize in *The Lotos-eaters* how Tennyson could attune his rhythms to his theme. After the even, dignified flow of the opening stanzas, with their carefully interlinked rhymes, there follow the changing measures of the Choric Song. Long line alternates with short line, strong ending with weak ending. The solemn stresses of

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass

give way to the quicker lilt of

Lo ! in the middle of the wood
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud,
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care ;

and again to the rollicking

We have had enough of action and of motion we,
Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge
was seething free

that merges into the magnificent crescendo of the final long, swinging rhythms. Such varied movement is not so pronounced in the regular metre of *The Lady of Shalott* ; but that metre itself is interesting since it is,

after all, an artificialized form of the old ballad stanza. The rhythm shows endless little variations and inversions of foot ; and, above all, a constantly recurring change from the rising iambic line to the falling trochaic. Almost any stanza will reveal the sensitive alternation of the two rhythms. Once, at least, a line of spondees suddenly checks the pace for the description of the lady's dwelling-place :

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver. . . .
Four gray walls, and four gray towers
Overlook a space of flowers. . . .

And the same flexibility characterizes even the rhythm of the four unrhymed poems. After Shakespeare and Milton, Tennyson is perhaps our greatest writer of blank verse. At its best in *Ulysses*, which is a kind of dramatic monologue, and *The Passing of Arthur*, in which narrative, description, and philosophy are combined, it has the essential qualities that characterize the verse of *Hamlet* and *Paradise Lost*—the stress inversions, the variation of caesura, and the ' overflow ' lines. But even at a little below its best, in the singing rhythms of *Ænone*, where we almost look for rhyme, and in the long narrative stretches of *Lancelot and Elaine*, there is but rarely the monotonousness of dull regularity. Shakespeare and Milton used their medium with the magnificent instinct of nature, Tennyson with conscious art.

It is impossible to dissociate any study of Tennyson's metre from his deliberate artifice of language. No poet has used the twin devices of alliteration and onomatopoeia to such effect ; few have understood so well the power of repetition of word or phrase. Many of his pictures he makes half in sound and half in colour. Examples abound ; the harmonizing of vowels and consonants to his sense is, indeed, not a mere ornament but an essential element of his work. Sometimes, as in

Mournful *Ænone*, wandering forlorn,

the effect is simple, and depends mainly upon the recurrence of a liquid consonant sound. Another line in *Ænone* describes the downward rushing of water by the rhythmical expedient of sudden falling stresses, in the midst of the normal iambic verse :

The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.

It is the sound more than the actual description that portrays to us the traffic, now heavy and slow, now light and fast, on the river down to Camelot :

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses ; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth, silken-sail'd . .

and pictures the two moods of autumn, one when

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley
Hear a song that echoes cheerly,

and the other, when

In the stormy east-wind straining
The pale yellow woods were waning . . .
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot.

With long vowels, liquid consonants and cunningly placed caesura, he calls up the twilight about Ulysses :

The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs : the deep
Moans round with many voices.

No one, it has been said, has so finely reproduced in words the distinctive sounds of water :

I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing through the reeds.

Two lines tell by the quality and disposition of their vowels the whole story of Sir Bedivere and the sword. Twice he fell—

And so strode back slow to the wounded king ;

but the third time Arthur does not ask in vain—

And lightly went the other to the king.

And when, after all, with the wounded Arthur on his shoulders, Sir Bedivere stumbles over the frozen hills to the lake, it is to the clatter of hard consonants that suddenly become soft with slow open vowels :

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armèd heels.—
And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

His repetition is no less effective. It is at its simplest in the refrain based upon the lucky jingle of Camelot—Shalott—Lancelot. Sometimes, as in *Ænone*, it seems to be an inherent part of the structure. The theme and the very atmosphere of the poem depend upon the repeated prayer :

O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida,
Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.

So, in *The Passing of Arthur*, the narrative centres on the threefold journey of Sir Bedivere with its recurring phrases. But more often the repetition is an echoing of words, akin to the parallelism of Bible verse :

Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine the lily maid of Astolat.

Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes.

INTRODUCTION

9

**The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades and falls. . . .**

And as with sound, so with colour. We have noted already that Tennyson is the artist of detail. From Keats he had learned much of the art of sensuous description ; and he passed on something of it to that group of poets—including Rossetti, William Morris, and Swinburne—who were continuing in literature the earlier ‘pre-Raphaelite’ movement in painting, that movement which did so much to revive interest in a colourful medievalism. But it is, perhaps, the work of Virgil, studied in expression and rich in ornament, that was the most consistent influence. We see it in Tennyson’s imagery. His similes are not so much the long-developed Homeric figures in which Matthew Arnold delighted as the perfectly wrought pictures of the Roman poet. A familiar one at the end of *The Passing of Arthur* will serve for example :

and the barge with oar and sail
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
 With swarthy webs.

Perhaps, too, he derived from the concise Latin diction his control of such a device as oxymoron :

He is all fault who hath no fault at all.

and the more familiar

His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Certainly he has, especially in his blank verse, some peculiarities of Latin syntax, especially the absolute phrase ; and now and then a definitely Virgilian turn of expression, as when he speaks of Sir Bedivere standing

This way and that dividing the swift mind
In act to throw ;

or of Elaine's troubled sorrow :

And now to right she turned, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest.

But, after all, Tennyson's pictures are his own. He could bring to perfect expression in words the observations of an eye that saw Nature as a whole, like a landscape, as well as in the minutest and most exquisite detail.

A traveller amid the varied scenery of Europe, he had no reason to limit himself to one colour and one design ; though it is, perhaps, in his English vignettes, especially those of *In Memoriam*, that we know him at his best. The sleep and quiet of his own Lincolnshire countryside brood over much of his work, even in the romantic poems printed here. It is that scene, etherealized by romance, and touched with the magic of sun and rain, which is pictured in *The Lady of Shalott*. He has, indeed, a special faculty for drawing Nature in repose. The enchanted island of the Lotos-eaters is heavy with the atmosphere of dreams :

Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the leaf the poppy hangs in sleep.

In *Ænone*, with its mountain setting (a reminiscence of his visit to the Pyrenees with Hallam)

the noonday quiet holds the hill :
The grasshopper is silent in the grass :
The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow, and the cicada sleeps.
The purple flowers droop : the golden bee
Is lily-cradled.

Below the frozen hills of *The Passing of Arthur* is the stillness of

the level lake
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Around their shores the Lotos-eaters love to watch the calm, unruffled sea,

the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray.

But, beyond these, it is interesting to note up and down the poems the descriptions that flash in a sudden phrase, like

And at their feet the crocus *brake like fire*

and

Shot *like a streamer of the northern morn,*

and, with that characteristic coining of a picturesque verb,

There lies the port ; the vessel puffs her sail ;
There *gloom* the dark green seas.

The six poems in this book reveal, indeed, the almost riotous excess of his word-painting. In *Lancelot and Elaine* and *The Passing of Arthur*, as perhaps in all the *Idylls*, the action of the narrative is dimmed by the richness of description. There is a lusciousness in the style, a sweetness that more than anything else has discredited the work of Tennyson in the eyes of later critics. 'Lawn Tennyson' he has been jocularly called in allusion to that patient cultivation which gives to his poetry the well-ordered beauty of a garden rather than the untrimmed loveliness of Nature. But though for an ornate poet that criticism must necessarily be true in part, it is not, as has already been hinted, the whole truth concerning Tennyson. The artistry was the deliberate work of a poet, not the lucky freak of a juggler in words. Mr. Drinkwater remarks how Tennyson's progress in

poetry was towards economy of effect ; that the decorative art of *The Lady of Shalott* became after many years the simplicity of *Crossing the Bar*. Yet, in truth, the simplicity was always present. Even at the end of *The Lady of Shalott* it appears in what is, after all, the most moving passage of the poem :

But Lancelot mused a little space,
He said ' She has a lovely face ;
God in His mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott.'

Ulysses, a comparatively early poem, is as direct and virile as anything Tennyson ever wrote ; and even *The Passing of Arthur* is as memorable for its restraint as for its perfection of ornament.

When the alloy, which needs must be found in the mass of any poet's work, has been purged away, the rest is gold. If that gold is more often beautifully chased and patterned than plain and unadorned, that is only to say Tennyson is supreme as the poet of the ornate. To deny him that is to deny him well-nigh everything.

TENNYSON: SELECT POEMS

CENONE

There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.
The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,
And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand 5
The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down
Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars
The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.
Behind the valley topmost Gargarus 10
Stands up and takes the morning: but in front
The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal
Troas, and Ilion's column'd citadel,
The crown of Troas.

Hither came at noon
Mournful Cēnone, wandering forlorn 15
Of Paris, once her playmate on the hills.
Her cheek had lost the rose, and round her neck
Floated her hair or seem'd to float in rest.
She, leaning on a fragment twined with vine,
Sang to the stillness, till the mountain-shade 20
Sloped downward to her seat from the upper cliff.

' O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida,
Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
For now the noonday quiet holds the hill:

The grasshopper is silent in the grass : 25
 The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
 Rests like a shadow, and the cicada sleeps.
 The purple flowers droop : the golden bee
 Is lily-cradled : I alone awake.
 My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love, 30
 My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim,
 And I am all aweary of my life.

‘ O mother Ida, many-fountain’d Ida,
 Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
 Hear me, O Earth, hear me, O Hills, O Caves 35
 That house the cold crown’d snake ! O mountain
 brooks,
 I am the daughter of a River-God,
 Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all
 My sorrow with my song, as yonder walls
 Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed, 40
 A cloud that gather’d shape : for it may be
 That, while I speak of it, a little while
 My heart may wander from its deeper woe.

‘ O mother Ida, many fountain’d Ida,
 Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. 45
 I waited underneath the dawning hills,
 Aloft the mountain lawn was dewy-dark,
 And dewy-dark aloft the mountain pine :
 Beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris,
 Leading a jet-black goat white-horn’d, white-hooved, 50
 Came up from reedy Simois all alone.

‘ O mother Ida, harken ere I die.
 Far-off the torrent call’d me from the cleft :
 Far up the solitary morning smote
 The streaks of virgin snow. With down-dropt eyes 55
 I sat alone : white-breasted like a star
 Fronting the dawn he moved ; a leopard skin
 Droop’d from his shoulder, but his sunny hair

Cluster'd about his temples like a God's ;
 And his cheek brighten'd as the foam-bow brightens 60
 When the wind blows the foam, and all my heart
 Went forth to embrace him coming ere he came.

' Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
 He smiled, and opening out his milk-white palm
 Disclosed a fruit of pure Hesperian gold, 65
 That smelt ambrosially, and while I look'd
 And listen'd, the full-flowing river of speech
 Came down upon my heart.

' " My own Œnone,
 Beautiful-brow'd Œnone, my own soul,
 Behold this fruit, whose gleaming rind ingrav'n 70
 ' For the most fair,' would seem to award it thine,
 As lovelier than whatever Oread haunt
 The knolls of Ida, loveliest in all grace
 Of movement, and the charm of married brows."

' Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. 75
 He prest the blossom of his lips to mine,
 And added " This was cast upon the board,
 When all the full-faced presence of the Gods
 Ranged in the halls of Peleus ; whereupon
 Rose feud, with question unto whom 'twere due : 80
 But light-foot Iris brought it yester-eve,
 Delivering, that to me, by common voice
 Elected umpire, Herè comes to-day,
 Pallas and Aphrodite, claiming each
 This meed of fairest. Thou, within the cave 85
 Behind yon whispering tuft of oldest pine,
 Mayst well behold them unbeheld, unheard
 Hear all, and see thy Paris judge of Gods."

' Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
 It was the deep midnight : one silvery cloud 90
 Had lost his way between the piney sides
 Of this long glen. Then to the bower they came,

Naked they came to that smooth-swarded bower,
 And at their feet the crocus brake like fire,
 Violet, amaracus, and asphodel, 95
 Lotos and lilies : and a wind arose,
 And overhead the wandering ivy and vine,
 This way and that, in many a wild festoon
 Ran riot, garlanding the gnarled boughs
 With bunch and berry and flower thro' and thro 100

' O mother Ida, harken ere I die.
 On the tree-tops a crested peacock lit,
 And o'er him flow'd a golden cloud, and lean'd
 Upon him, slowly dropping fragrant dew.
 Then first I heard the voice of her, to whom 105
 Coming thro' Heaven, like a light that grows
 Larger and clearer, with one mind the Gods
 Rise up for reverence. She to Paris made
 Proffer of royal power, ample rule
 Unquestion'd, overflowing revenue 110
 Wherewith to embellish state, " from many a vale
 And river-sunder'd champaign clothed with corn,
 Or labour'd mines undrainable of ore.
 Honour," she said, " and homage, tax and toll,
 From many an inland town and haven large, 115
 Mast-throng'd beneath her shadowing citadel
 In glassy bays among her tallest towers."

' O mother Ida, harken ere I die.
 Still she spake on and still she spake of power,
 " Which in all action is the end of all ; 120
 Power fitted to the season ; wisdom-bred
 And throned of wisdom—from all neighbour crowns
 Alliance and allegiance, till thy hand
 Fail from the soeptre-staff. Such boon from me,
 From me, Heaven's Queen, Paris, to thee king-born, 125
 A shepherd all thy life but yet king-born,
 Should come most welcome, seeing men, in power
 Only, are likest gods, who have attain'd

Rest in a happy place and quiet seats
Above the thunder, with undying bliss 130
In knowledge of their own supremacy."

' Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
She ceased, and Paris held the costly fruit
Out at arm's-length, so much the thought of power
Flatter'd his spirit ; but Pallas where she stood 135
Somewhat apart, her clear and bared limbs
O'erthwarted with the brazen-headed spear
Upon her pearly shoulder leaning cold,
The while, above, her full and earnest eye
Over her snow-cold breast and angry cheek 140
Kept watch, waiting decision, made reply.

' " Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
Yet not for power (power of herself
Would come uncall'd for) but to live by law, 145
Acting the law we live by without fear ;
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence."

' Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
Again she said : " I woo thee not with gifts. 150
Sequel of guerdon could not alter me
To fairer. Judge thou me by what I am,
So shalt thou find me fairest.

Yet, indeed,
If gazing on divinity disrobed
Thy mortal eyes are frail to judge of fair, 155
Unbiass'd by self-profit, oh ! rest thee sure
That I shall love thee well and cleave to thee,
So that my vigour, wedded to thy blood,
Shall strike within thy pulses, like a God's,
To push thee forward thro' a life of shocks, 160
Dangers, and deeds, until endurance grow
Sinew'd with action, and the full-grown will,

Circled thro' all experiences, pure law,
Commeasure perfect freedom."

' Here she ceased,
And Paris ponder'd, and I cried, " O Paris, 165
Give it to Pallas ! " but he heard me not,
Or hearing would not hear me, woe is me !

' O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida,
Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
Idalian Aphrodite beautiful, 170
Fresh as the foam, new-bathed in Paphian wells,
With rosy slender fingers backward drew
From her warm brows and bosom her deep hair
Ambrosial, golden round her lucid throat
And shoulder : from the violets her light foot 175
Shone rosy-white, and o'er her rounded form
Between the shadows of the vine-bunches
Floated the glowing sunlights, as she moved.

' Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
She with a subtle smile in her mild eyes, 180
The herald of her triumph, drawing nigh
Half-whisper'd in his ear, " I promise thee
The fairest and most loving wife in Greece."
She spoke and laugh'd : I shut my sight for fear :
But when I look'd, Paris had raised his arm, 185
And I beheld great Herè's angry eyes,
As she withdrew into the golden cloud,
And I was left alone within the bower ;
And from that time to this I am alone,
And I shall be alone until I die. 190

' Yet, mother Ida, harken ere I die.
Fairest—why fairest wife ? am I not fair ?
My love hath told me so a thousand times.
Methinks I must be fair, for yesterday,
' When I past by, a wild and wanton pard, 195
Eyed like the evening star, with playful tail

Crouch'd fawning in the weed. Most loving is she ?
 Ah me, my mountain shepherd, that my arms
 Were wound about thee, and my hot lips prest
 Close, close to thine in that quick-falling dew 200
 Of fruitful kisses, thick as Autumn rains
 Flash in the pools of whirling Simois.

' O mother, hear me yet before I die.
 They came, they cut away my tallest pines,
 My dark tall pines, that plumed the craggy ledge 205
 High over the blue gorge, and all between
 The snowy peak and snow-white cataract
 Foster'd the callow eaglet—from beneath
 Whose thick mysterious boughs in the dark morn
 The panther's roar came muffled, while I sat 210
 Low in the valley. Never, never more
 Shall lone Œnone see the morning mist
 Sweep thro' them ; never see them overlaid
 With narrow moon-lit slips of silver cloud,
 Between the loud stream and the trembling stars. 215

' O mother, hear me yet before I die.
 I wish that somewhere in the ruin'd folds,
 Among the fragments tumbled from the glens,
 Or the dry thickets, I could meet with her,
 The Abominable, that uninvited came 220
 Into the fair Peleian banquet-hall,
 And cast the golden fruit upon the board,
 And bred this change ; that I might speak my mind
 And tell her to her face how much I hate
 Her presence, hated both of Gods and men. 225

' O mother, hear me yet before I die.
 Hath he not sworn his love a thousand times,
 In this green valley, under this green hill,
 Ev'n on this hand, and sitting on this stone ?
 Seal'd it with kisses ? water'd it with tears ? 230
 O happy tears, and how unlike to these !

O happy Heaven, how canst thou see my face ?
O happy earth, how canst thou bear my weight ?
O death, death, death, thou ever-floating cloud,
There are enough unhappy on this earth, 235
Pass by the happy souls, that love to live :
I pray thee, pass before my light of life,
And shadow all my soul, that I may die.
Thou weighest heavy on the heart within,
Weigh heavy on my eyelids : let me die. 240

‘ O mother, hear me yet before I die.
I will not die alone, for fiery thoughts
Do shape themselves within me, more and more,
Whereof I catch the issue, as I hear
Dead sounds at night come from the inmost hills, 245
Like footsteps upon wool. I dimly see
My far-off doubtful purpose, as a mother
Conjectures of the features of her child
Ere it is born : her child !—a shudder comes
Across me : never child be born of me, 250
Unblest, to vex me with his father’s eyes !

‘ O mother, hear me yet before I die.
Hear me, O earth. I will not die alone,
Lest their shrill happy laughter come to me
Walking the cold and starless road of Death 255
Uncomforted, leaving my ancient love
With the Greek woman. I will rise and go
Down into Troy, and ere the stars come forth
Talk with the wild Cassandra, for she says
A fire dances before her, and a sound 260
Rings ever in her ears of armed men.
What this may be I know not, but I know
That, wheresoe’er I am by night and day,
All earth and air seem only burning fire.’

THE LOTOS-EATERS

‘ Courage ! ’ he said, and pointed toward the land,
‘ This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon.’
In the afternoon they came unto a land,
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon ;
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams ! some, like a downward smoke, 10
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go ;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land : far off, three mountain-tops, 15
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flush'd : and, dew'd with showery drops,
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset linger'd low adown
In the red West : thro' mountain clefts the dale 20
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale
And meadow, set with slender galingale ;
A land where all things always seem'd the same !
And round about the keel with faces pale, 25
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave
To each, but whoso did receive of them, 30
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave

On alien shores ; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave ;
And deep-asleep he seem'd, yet all awake, 35
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Between the sun and moon upon the shore ;
And sweet it was to dream of Father-land,
Of child, and wife, and slave ; but evermore 40
Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, ' We will return no more ; '
And all at once they sang, ' Our island home
Is far beyond the wave ; we will no longer roam.' 45

CHORIC SONG

I

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass ;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies, 50
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes ;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful
skies.

Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep, 55
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

II

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,

THE LOTOS-EATERS

23

While all things else have rest from weariness ?
All things have rest : why should we toil alone, 60
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown :
Nor ever fold our wings,
And cease from wanderings, 65
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm ;
Nor harken what the inner spirit sings,
'There is no joy but calm !'
Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things ?

III

Lo ! in the middle of the wood, 70
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed ; and turning yellow 75
Falls, and floats adown the air.
Lo ! sweeten'd with the summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,
Drops in a silent autumn night.
All its allotted length of days, 80
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.

IV

Hateful is the dark-blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea. 85
Death is the end of life ; ah, why
Should life all labour be ?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.

Let us alone. What is it that will last ? 90
 All things are taken from us, and become
 Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
 Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
 To war with evil ? Is there any peace
 In ever climbing up the climbing wave ? 95
 All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
 In silence ; ripen, fall, and cease :
 Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

V

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
 With half-shut eyes ever to seem 100
 Falling asleep in a half-dream !
 To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
 Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height ;
 To hear each other's whisper'd speech ;
 Eating the Lotos day by day, 105
 To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
 And tender curving lines of creamy spray ;
 To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
 To the influence of mild-minded melancholy ;
 To muse and brood and live again in memory, 110
 With those old faces of our infancy
 Heap'd over with a mound of grass,
 Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass !

VI

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,
 And dear the last embraces of our wives 115
 And their warm tears : but all hath suffer'd change ;
 For surely now our household hearths are cold :
 Our sons inherit us : our looks are strange :
 And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.
 Or else the island princes over-bold 120

Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings
 Before them of the ten-years' war in Troy,
 And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things.
 Is there confusion in the little isle ?
 Let what is broken so remain. 125
 The Gods are hard to reconcile :
 'Tis hard to settle order once again.
 There is confusion worse than death,
 Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
 Long labour unto aged breath, 130
 Sore task to hearts worn out with many wars
 And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars.

VII

But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
 How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly)
 With half-dropt eyelids still, 135
 Beneath a heaven dark and holy,
 To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
 His waters from the purple hill—
 To hear the dewy echoes calling
 From cave to cave thro' the thick-twined vine— 140
 To watch the emerald-colour'd water falling
 Thro' many a wov'n acanthus-wreath divine !
 Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
 Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine.

VIII

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak : 145
 The Lotos blows by every winding creek :
 All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone :
 Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone
 Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos-
 dust is blown.
 We have had enough of action, and of motion we, 150

ULYSSES

It little profits that an idle king,
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
 Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me. 5
 I cannot rest from travel : I will drink
 Life to the lees : all times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone ; on shore, and when
 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades 10
 Vext the dim sea : I am become a name ;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known ; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all ; 15
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
 I am a part of all that I have met ;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades 20
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use !
 As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me 25
 Little remains : but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things ; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire 30
 To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—

Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil 35
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail 40
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port : the vessel puffs her sail :
 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners, 45
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with
 me—

That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old ;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil ; 50
 Death closes all : but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks :
 The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs : the deep 55
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite
 The sounding furrows ; for my purpose holds
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths 60
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down :
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
 Tho' much is taken, much abides ; and tho' 65
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are ;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. 70

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

PART I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky ;
And thro' the field the road runs by
 To many-tower'd Camelot ;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
 The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver, 10
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
 Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers, 15
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
 The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd 20
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
 Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand? 25
Or is she known in all the land,
 The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,

Hear a song that echoes cheerly 30
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot :
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers ' 'Tis the fairy 35
Lady of Shalott.'

PART II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay 40
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott. 45

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot : 50
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad, 55
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot ;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue 60
The knights come riding two and two :

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

81

She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights, 65
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights,
And music, went to Camelot :
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed ; 70
' I am half sick of shadows,' said
The Lady of Shalott.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves, 75
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field, 80
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily 85
As he rode down to Camelot :
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott. 90

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,

The helmet and the helmet-feather
 Burn'd like one burning flame together,
 As he rode down to Camelot. 95
 As often thro' the purple night,
 Below the starry clusters bright,
 Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
 Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd ; 100
 On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode ;
 From underneath his helmet flow'd
 His coal-black curls as on he rode,
 As he rode down to Camelot.
 From the bank and from the river 105
 He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
 'Tirra lirra,' by the river
 Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
 She made three paces thro' the room, 110
 She saw the water-lily bloom,
 She saw the helmet and the plume,
 She look'd down to Camelot.
 Out flew the web and floated wide ;
 The mirror crack'd from side to side ; 115
 'The curse is come upon me,' cried
 The Lady of Shalott.

PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
 The pale yellow woods were waning,
 The broad stream in his banks complaining, 120
 Heavily the low sky raining
 Over tower'd Camelot ;
 Down she came and found a boat
 Beneath a willow left afloat,

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

33

And round about the prow she wrote 125
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse—
Like some bold seër in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance 130
 Did she look to Camelot.

And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay ;
The broad stream bore her far away,
 The Lady of Shalott. 135

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
 She floated down to Camelot : 140
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy, 145
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
 Turn'd to tower'd Camelot ;
For ere she reach'd upon the tide 150
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery, 155
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
 Silent into Camelot.

Out upon the wharfs they came,
 Knight and burgher, lord and dame, 160
 And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this ? and what is here ?
 And in the lighted palace near
 Died the sound of royal cheer ; 165
 And they cross'd themselves for fear,
 All the knights at Camelot :
 But Lancelot mused a little space ;
 He said, ' She has a lovely face ;
 God in His mercy lend her grace, 170
 The Lady of Shalott.'

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable,
 Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
 High in her chamber up a tower to the east
 Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot ;
 Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray 5
 Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam ;
 Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it
 A case of silk, and braided thereupon
 All the devices blazon'd on the shield
 In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, 10
 A border fantasy of branch and flower,
 And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
 Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
 Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
 That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door, 15
 Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
 Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
 Now made a pretty history to herself
 Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
 And every scratch a lance had made upon it, 20

Conjecturing when and where : this cut is fresh ;
 That ten years back ; this dealt him at Caerlyle ;
 That at Caerleon ; this at Camelot :
 And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there !
 And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God 25
 Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
 And saved him : so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
 Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name ?
 He left it with her, when he rode to tilt 30
 For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
 Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
 Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,
 Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse, 35
 Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
 A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
 Like its own mists to all the mountain side :
 For here two brothers, one a king, had met
 And fought together ; but their names were lost ; 40
 And each had slain his brother at a blow ;
 And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd :
 And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
 And lichen'd into colour with the crags :

And he, that once was king, had on a crown 45
 Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.
 And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass,
 All in a misty moonshine, unawares
 Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
 Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown 50
 Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims
 Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn :
 And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
 And set it on his head, and in his heart
 Heard murmurs, ' Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.' 55

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems
 Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights,
 Saying, ' These jewels, whereupon I chanced
 Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's—
 For public use : henceforward let there be, 60
 Once every year, a joust for one of these :
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
 The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land 65
 Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke :
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
 Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
 With purpose to present them to the Queen,
 When all were won ; but meaning all at once 70
 To snare her royal fancy with a boon
 Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
 And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
 Hard on the river nigh the place which now 75
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
 Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
 ' Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
 To these fair jousts ? ' ' Yea, lord,' she said, ' ye know
 it.' 80
 ' Then will ye miss,' he answer'd, ' the great deeds
 Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
 A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen
 Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
 On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King. 85
 He thinking that he read her meaning there,
 ' Stay with me, I am sick ; my love is more
 Than many diamonds,' yielded ; and a heart
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen
 (However much he yearn'd to make complete 90
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)

Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
 'Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
 And lets me from the saddle'; and the King
 Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way. 95
 No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

'To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !
 Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights
 Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
 Will murmur, " Lo the shameless ones, who take 100
 Their pastime now the trustful King is gone ! " '
 Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain :
 'Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,
 My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
 Then of the crowd ye took no more account 105
 Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
 When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
 And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
 Them surely can I silence with all ease.
 But now my loyal worship is allow'd 110
 Of all men : many a bard, without offence,
 Has link'd our names together in his lay,
 Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
 The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast
 Have pledged us in this union, while the King 115
 Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?
 Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,
 Now weary of my service and devoir,
 Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ? '

She broke into a little scornful laugh : 120
 'Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
 That passionate perfection, my good lord—
 But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven ?
 He never spake word of reproach to me,
 He never had a glimpse of mine untruth, 125
 He cares not for me : only here to-day
 There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes :

Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him—else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible, 130
To make them like himself : but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all :
For who loves me must have a touch of earth ;
The low sun makes the colour : I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond. 135
And therefore hear my words : go to the jousts :
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest ; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights : 140
' And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a King who honours his own word,
As if it were his God's ? '

' Yea,' said the Queen,
' A moral child without the craft to rule, 145
Else had he not lost me : but listen to me,
If I must find you wit : we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,
But knowing you are Lancelot ; your great name,
This conquers : hide it therefore ; go unknown : 150
Win ! by this kiss you will : and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory ; for to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes. 155
He loves it in his knights more than himself :
They prove to him his work : win and return.'

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare, 160
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,

And there among the solitary downs,
 Full often lost in fancy, lost his way ;
 Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
 That all in loops and links among the dales 165
 Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
 Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
 Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
 Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
 Who let him into lodging and disarm'd. 170
 And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man ;
 And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
 With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
 Moving to meet him in the castle court ;
 And close behind them stept the lily maid 175
 Elaine, his daughter ; mother of the house
 There was not : some light jest among them rose
 With laughter dying down as the great knight
 Approach'd them : then the Lord of Astolat :
 ' Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name 180
 Livest between the lips ? for by thy state
 And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
 After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
 Him have I seen : the rest, his Table Round,
 Known as they are, to me they are unknown.' 185

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :
 ' Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known
 What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
 But since I go to joust as one unknown
 At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not, 190
 Hereafter ye shall know me—and the shield—
 I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
 Blank, or at least with some device not minc.'

Then said the Lord of Astolat, ' Here is Torre's :
 Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre. 195
 And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
 His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,

'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'
Here laugh'd the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight? 200
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before.' 205

'Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not
Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,
'For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre :
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go :
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt 210
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it 215
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight :
Win shall I not, but do my best to win : 220
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

'So ye will grace me,' answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend : 225
And you shall win this diamond,—as I hear
It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.'
'A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,
'Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.' 230
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement

Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
 Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd : 235
 ' If what is fair be but for what is fair,
 And only queens are to be counted so,
 Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
 Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
 Not violating the bond of like to like.' 240

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,
 Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
 Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.
 The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
 In battle with the love he bare his lord, 245
 Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
 Another sinning on such heights with one,
 The flower of all the west and all the world,
 Had been the sleeker for it : but in him
 His mood was often like a fiend, and rose 250
 And drove him into wastes and solitudes
 For agony, who was yet a living soul.
 Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
 That ever among ladies ate in hall,
 And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes. 255
 However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
 Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
 And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
 And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court, 260
 Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
 Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
 Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
 But kindly man moving among his kind :
 Whom they with meats and vintage of their best 265
 And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
 And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
 And ever well and readily answer'd he :
 But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,

Suddenly speaking of the wordless man, 270
 Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,
 The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
 'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
 Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd ;
 But I, my sons, and little daughter fled 275
 From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
 By the great river in a boatman's hut.
 Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
 The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt 280
 By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
 Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.
 O tell us—for we live apart—you know
 Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke
 And answer'd him at full, as having been 285
 With Arthur in the fight which all day long
 Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;
 And in the four loud battles by the shore
 Of Duglas ; that on Bassa ; then the war
 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts 290
 Of Celidon the forest ; and again
 By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
 Carved of one emerald center'd in a sun
 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed ; 295
 And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,
 When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse
 Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit, 300
 Where many a heathen fell ; 'and on the mount
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King
 Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
 And all his legions crying Christ and him,
 And break them ; and I saw him, after, stand 305
 High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume

Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
 And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
 "They are broken, they are broken!" for the King,
 However mild he seems at home, nor cares 310
 For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—
 For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs
 Saying, his knights are better men than he—
 Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
 Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives 315
 No greater leader.'

While he utter'd this,
 Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
 'Save your great self, fair lord,' and when he fell
 From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—
 Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind— 320
 She still took note that when the living smile
 Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
 Of melancholy severe, from which again,
 Whenever in her hovering to and fro
 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer, 325
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
 Of manners and of nature: and she thought
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
 And all night long his face before her lived,
 As when a painter, poring on a face, 330
 Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
 Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
 The shape and colour of a mind and life,
 Lives for his children, ever at its best
 And fullest; so the face before her lived, 335
 Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
 Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
 Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
 She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
 First as in fear, step after step, she stole 340
 Down the long tower-steps, hesitating:
 Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,

'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd 345
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light. 350
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire, 355
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
'Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he, 360
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favour of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'
'Yea, so,' she answer'd; 'then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord, 365
That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd, 'True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve 370
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living,' and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight; 375
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:
'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield 380

In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'
 She answer'd, 'twice to-day. I am your squire !'
 Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,
 For fear our people call you lily maid
 In earnest, let me bring your colour back ; 385
 Once, twice, and thrice : now get you hence to bed :'
 So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
 And thus they moved away : she stay'd a minute,
 Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—
 Her bright hair blown about the serious face 390
 Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—
 Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
 In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
 Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
 Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield, 395
 There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
 Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
 To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
 Not far from Camelot, now for forty years 400
 A hermit, who had pray'd, labour'd and pray'd,
 And ever labouring had scoop'd himself
 In the white rock a chapel and a hall
 On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
 And cells and chambers : all were fair and dry ; 405
 The green light from the meadows underneath
 Struck up and lived along the milky roofs ;
 And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
 And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
 And thither wending there that night they bode. 410

But when the next day broke from underground,
 And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
 They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away :
 Then Lancelot saying, 'Hear, but hold my name
 Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,' 415
 Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,

Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer, 'Is it indeed?'
And after muttering 'The great Lancelot,'
At last he got his breath and answer'd, 'One, 420
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there—then were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen.' 425

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat 430
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make 435
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work : 440
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,
'Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance : but there is many a youth 445
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it ; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great :
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him 450
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew ; and then did either side,

They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
 Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
 Meet in the midst, and there so furiously 455
 Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,
 If any man that day were left afield,
 The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
 And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
 Which were the weaker ; then he hurl'd into it 460
 Against the stronger : little need to speak
 Of Lancelot in his glory ! King, duke, earl,
 Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
 Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists, 465
 Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
 Should do and almost overdo the deeds
 Of Lancelot ; and one said to the other, ' Lo !
 What is he ? I do not mean the force alone—
 The grace and versatility of the man ! 470
 Is it not Lancelot ? ' ' When has Lancelot worn
 Favour of any lady in the lists ?
 Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'
 ' How then ? who then ? ' a fury seized them all,
 A fiery family passion for the name 475
 Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
 They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and
 thus,
 Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made
 In moving, all together down upon him
 Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea, 480
 Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
 Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
 Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
 And him that helms it, so they overbore
 Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear 485
 Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
 Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
 Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully ;
 He bore a knight of old repute to the earth, 490
 And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
 He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
 But thought to do while he might yet endure,
 And being lustily holpen by the rest,
 His party,—tho' it seem'd half-miracle, 495
 To those he fought with,—drave his kith and kin,
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,
 Back to the barrier ; then the trumpets blew
 Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve
 Of scarlet, and the pearls ; and all the knights, 500
 His party, cried ' Advance and take thy prize
 The diamond ' ; but he answer'd, ' Diamond me
 No diamonds ! for God's love, a little air !
 Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death !
 Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.' 505

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
 With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
 There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, ' Draw the lance-head ' :
 ' Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine, 510
 ' I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'
 But he, ' I die already with it : draw—
 Draw,'—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
 A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
 And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank 515
 For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
 Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
 There stanch'd his wound ; and there, in daily doubt
 Whether 'to live or die, for many a week
 Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove 520
 Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
 And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,

His party, knights of utmost North and West,
 Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles, 525
 Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
 'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
 Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
 Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'
 'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one, 530
 So great a knight as we have seen to-day—
 He seem'd to me another Lancelot—
 Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—
 He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,
 O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight. 535
 Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.
 I charge you that you get at once to horse.
 And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
 Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given :
 His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him 540
 No customary honour : since the knight
 Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
 Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
 This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
 And bring us where he is, and how he fares, 545
 And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,
 To which it made a restless heart, he took,
 And gave, the diamond : then from where he sat
 At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose, 550
 With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
 In the mid might and flourish of his May,
 Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
 And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint
 And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal 555
 Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
 Nor often loyal to his word, and now
 Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
 In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
 The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings. 560

So all in wrath he got to horse and went ;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking ' Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound, 565
And ridd'n away to die ? ' So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
' Love, are you yet so sick ? ' ' Nay, lord,' she said.
' And where is Lancelot ? ' Then the Queen amazed, 570
' Was he not with you ? won he not your prize ? '
' Nay, but one like him.' ' Why that like was he.'
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said, ' Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk 575
That men went down before his spear at a touch,
But knowing he was Lancelot ; his great name
Conquer'd ; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound, 580
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd ;
And added, " Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory." '

Then replied the King : 585
' Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
Surely his King and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed, 590
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter : now remains
But little cause for laughter : his own kin—
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this !— 595
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him ;

So that he went sore wounded from the field :
 Yet good news too : for goodly hopes are mine
 That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
 He wore, against his wont, upon his helm 600
 A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
 Some gentle maiden's gift.'

'Yea, lord,' she said,
 'Thy hopes are mine,' and saying that, she choked,
 And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
 Past to her chamber, and there flung herself 605
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
 And shriek'd out 'Traitor' to the unhearing wall,
 Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale. 610

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
 Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
 Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,
 And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat :
 Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid 615
 Glanced at, and cried, 'What news from Camelot, lord ?
 What of the knight with the red sleeve ?' 'He won.'
 'I knew it,' she said. 'But parted from the jousts
 Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath ;
 Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go ; 620
 Thereon she smote her hand : wellnigh she swoon'd :
 And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
 The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
 Reported who he was, and on what quest
 Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find 625
 The victor, but had ridd'n a random round
 To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
 To whom the Lord of Astolat, 'Bide with us,
 And ride no more at random, noble Prince !
 Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ; 630
 This will he send or come for : furthermore

Our son is with him ; we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear.' To this the courteous Prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it, 635
And stay'd ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :
Where could be found face daintier ? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd :
' Well—if I bide, lo ! this wild flower for me ! ' 640
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence 645
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, ' Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name ? Why slight
your King, 650
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds ? ' ' Nay, by mine head,' said he,
' I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven, 655
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes ;
But an ye will it let me see the shield.'
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd : 660
' Right was the King ! our Lancelot ! that true man ! '
' And right was I,' she answer'd merrily, ' I,
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.'
' And if I dream'd,' said Gawain, ' that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon ! lo, ye know it ! 665
Speak therefore : shall I waste myself in vain ? '
Full simple was her answer, ' What know I ?
My brethren have been all my fellowship ;

And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
 Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd, 670
 Meseem'd, of what they knew not ; so myself—
 I know not if I know what true love is,
 But if I know, then, if I love not him,
 I know there is none other I can love.'
 'Yea, by God's death,' said he, 'ye love him well, 675
 But would not, knew ye what all others know,
 And whom he loves.' 'So be it,' cried Elaine,
 And lifted her fair face and moved away :
 But he pursued her, calling, 'Stay a little !
 One golden minute's grace ! he wore your sleeve : 680
 Would he break faith with one I may not name ?
 Must our true man change like a leaf at last ?
 Nay—like enow : why then, far be it from me
 To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !
 And, damsel, for I deem you know full well 685
 Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
 My quest with you ; the diamond also : here !
 For if you love, it will be sweet to give it ;
 And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
 From your own hand ; and whether he love or not, 690
 A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
 A thousand times !—a thousand times farewell !
 Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
 May meet at court hereafter : there, I think,
 So ye will learn the courtesies of the court, 695
 We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,
 And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,
 The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
 Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away. 700

Thence to the court he past ; there told the King
 What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'
 And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt ;

But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round
The region : but I lighted on the maid 705
Whose sleeve he wore ; she loves him ; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond : she will render it ;
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied, 710
'Too courteous truly ! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

Hè spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word, 715
Linger'd that other, staring after him ;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed :
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot, 720
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news. 725
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared : 730
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
With lips severely placid, felt the knot 735
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat, 740
 Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
 The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
 Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
 Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,
 'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault 745
 Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
 Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'
 'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'
 She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'
 'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine: 750
 Bide,' answer'd he: 'we needs must hear anon
 Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,
 'And of that other, for I needs must hence
 And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,
 And with mine own hand give his diamond to him, 755
 Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
 As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.
 Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
 Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid. 760
 The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
 My father, to be sweet and servicable
 To noble knights in sickness, as ye know
 When these have worn their tokens; let me hence
 I pray you.' Then her father nodding said, 765
 'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
 Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
 Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it—
 And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
 For any mouth to gape for save a queen's— 770
 Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
 Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,
 And while she made her ready for her ride,
 Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear, 775
 'Being so very wilful you must go,'

And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
 'Being so very wilful you must die.'
 But she was happy enough and shook it off,
 As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us ; 780
 And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
 'What matter, so I help him back to life ?'
 Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
 Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
 To Camelot, and before the city-gates 785
 Came on her brother with a happy face
 Making a roan horse caper and curvet
 For pleasure all about a field of flowers :
 Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,
 How fares my lord Sir Lancelot ?' He amazed, 790
 'Torre and Elaine ! why here ? Sir Lancelot !
 How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot ?'
 But when the maid had told him all her tale,
 Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
 Left them, and under the strange-statued gate, 795
 Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
 Past up the still rich city to his kin,
 His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot ;
 And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
 Led to the caves : there first she saw the casque 800
 Of Lancelot on the wall : her scarlet sleeve,
 Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
 Stream'd from it still ; and in her heart she laugh'd,
 Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
 But meant once more perchance to tourney in it. 805
 And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
 His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
 Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
 Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
 Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn, 810
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
 Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
 The sound not wonted in a place so still
 Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes

Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying, 815
 'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King :'
 His eyes glisten'd : she fancied 'Is it for me ?'
 And when the maid had told him all the tale
 Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest
 Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt 820
 Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
 And laid the diamond in his open hand.
 Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
 That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
 At once she slipt like water to the floor. 825
 'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.
 Rest must you here.' 'No rest for me,' she said ;
 'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'
 What might she mean by that ? his large black eyes,
 Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her, 830
 Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
 In the heart's colours on her simple face ;
 And Lancelot look'd and was perplex't in mind,
 And being weak in body said no more ;
 But did not love the colour ; woman's love, 835
 Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd
 Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
 And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
 Far up the dim rich city to her kin ; 840
 There bode the night : but woke with dawn, and past
 Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
 Thence to the cave : so day by day she past
 In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
 Gliding, and every day she tended him, 845
 And likewise many a night : and Lancelot
 Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
 Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
 Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
 Uncourteous, even he : but the meek maid 850
 Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him

Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
 Milder than any mother to a sick child,
 And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
 Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love 855
 Upbore her ; till the hermit, skill'd in all
 The simples and the science of that time,
 Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
 And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
 Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine, 860
 Would listen for her coming and regret
 Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
 And loved her with all love except the love
 Of man and woman when they love their best,
 Closest and sweetest, and had died the death 865
 In any knightly fashion for her sake.
 And peradventure had he seen her first
 She might have made this and that other world
 Another world for the sick man ; but now
 The shackles of an old love straiten'd him, 870
 His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
 And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
 Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
 These, as but born of sickness, could not live : 875
 For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
 Full often the bright image of one face,
 Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
 Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
 Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace 880
 Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
 Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
 What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
 She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
 And drove her ere her time across the fields 885
 Far into the rich city, where alone
 She murmur'd, ' Vain, in vain : it cannot be.
 He will not love me ; how then ? must I die ? '

Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
 That has but one plain passage of few notes, 890
 Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
 For all an April morning, till the ear
 Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
 Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?'
 And now to right she turn'd, and now to left, 895
 And found no ease in turning or in rest;
 And 'Him or death,' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'
 Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
 To Astolat returning rode the three. 900
 There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
 In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
 She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought
 'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
 If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.' 905
 And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
 That she should ask some goodly gift of him
 For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun
 To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
 Such service have ye done me, that I make 910
 My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
 In mine own land, and what I will I can.'
 Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
 But like a ghost without the power to speak.
 And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish, 915
 And bode among them yet a little space
 Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
 He found her in among the garden yews,
 And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,
 Seeing I go to-day: 'then out she brake: 920
 'Going? and we shall never see you more.
 And I must die for want of one bold word.'
 'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'
 Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
 'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.' 925

'Ah, sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this ?'
And innocently extending her white arms,
'Your love,' she said, 'your love—to be your wife.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine : 930
But now there never will be wife of mine.'
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world, 935
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation—nay,
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
And your good father's kindness.' And she said, 940
'Not to be with you, not to see your face—
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'
'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay !
This is not love : but love's first flash in youth,
Most common : yea, I know it of mine own self : 945
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age :
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood, 950
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy : furthermore,
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood, 955
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot.'

While he spoke
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied : 960
'Of all this will I nothing ;' and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of
yew
Their talk had pierced, her father : ' Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead. 965
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,
' That were against me : what I can I will ;'
And there that day remain'd, and toward even 970
Sent for his shield : full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield ;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone. 975
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound ;
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away. 980
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat :
His very shield was gone ; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd 985
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
' Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, ' Peace to thee,
Sweet sister,' whom she answer'd with all calm. 990
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd ; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the fallow-rifted glooms 995
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song 'The Song of Love and Death,'
And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ; 1000
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be :
Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die. 1005

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be ;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me ; 1010
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house 1015
That ever shrieks before a death,' and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo ! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die !'

As when we dwell upon a word we know, 1020
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought
'Is this Elaine ?' till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay, 1025
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem'd a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,

And when ye used to take me with the flood 1030
 Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
 Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
 That has the poplar on it : there ye fixt
 Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
 And yet I cried because ye would not pass 1035
 Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
 Until we found the palace of the King.
 And yet ye would not ; but this night I dream'd
 That I was all alone upon the flood,
 And then I said, " Now shall I have my will : " 1040
 And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
 So let me hence that I may pass at last
 Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
 Until I find the palace of the King.
 There will I enter in among them all, 1045
 And no man there will dare to mock at me ;
 But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
 And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me ;
 Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
 Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade me one : 1050
 And there the King will know me and my love,
 And there the Queen herself will pity me,
 And all the gentle court will welcome me,
 And after my long voyage I shall rest !'

' Peace,' said her father, ' O my child, ye seem 1055
 Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
 So far, being sick ? and wherefore would ye look
 On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all ?'

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
 And bluster into stormy sobs and say, 1060
 ' I never loved him : an I meet with him,
 I care not howsoever great he be,
 Then will I strike at him and strike him down,
 Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
 For this discomfort he hath done the house.' 1065

To whom the gentle sister made reply,
'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me, than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.' 1070

'Highest?' the father answer'd, echoing 'highest?'
(He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame: 1075
And she returns his love in open shame;
If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders: never yet 1080
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you, 1085
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For if I could believe the things you say 1090
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven, 1095
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he ask'd
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly'; she replied,
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world, 1100

But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote
 The letter she devised ; which being writ
 And folded, ' O sweet father, tender and true,
 Deny me not,' she said—' ye never yet
 Denied my fancies—this, however strange, 1105
 My latest : lay the letter in my hand
 A little ere I die, and close the hand
 Upon it ; I shall guard it even in death.
 And when the heat is gone from out my heart,
 Then take the little bed on which I died 1110
 For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
 For richness, and me also like the Queen
 In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
 And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
 To take me to the river, and a barge 1115
 Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
 I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
 There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
 And none of you can speak for me so well.
 And therefore let our dumb old man alone 1120
 Go with me, he can steer and row, and he
 Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased : her father promised ; whereupon
 She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
 Was rather in the fantasy than the blood. 1125
 But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
 Her father laid the letter in her hand,
 And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
 So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground, 1130
 Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
 Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
 Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
 Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
 Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay. 1135
 There sat the lifelong creature of the house,

Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed, 1140
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her
'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears. 1145
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold 1150
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved 1155
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds : for he saw 1160
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet 1165
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side, 1170
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, 'Queen,

Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
 Take, what I had not won except for you,
 These jewels, and make me happy, making them 1175
 An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
 Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
 Is tawnier than her cygnets: these are words:
 Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
 In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it 1180
 Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
 Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,
 I hear of rumours flying thro' your court.
 Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
 Should have in it an absoluter trust 1185
 To make up that defect: let rumours be:
 When did not rumours fly? these, as I trust
 That you trust me in your own nobleness,
 I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen 1190
 Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
 Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
 Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
 Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
 Received at once and laid aside the gems 1195
 There on a table near her, and replied:

'It may be, I am quicker of belief
 Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
 Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
 This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill, 1200
 It can be broken easier. I for you
 This many a year have done despite and wrong
 To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
 I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
 Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth 1205
 Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
 To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
 Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!

For her ! for your new fancy. Only this
 Grant me, I pray you : have your joys apart. 1210
 I doubt not that however changed, you keep
 So much of what is graceful : and myself
 Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
 In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule :
 So cannot speak my mind. An end to this ! 1215
 A strange one ! yet I take it with Amen.
 So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls ;
 Deck her with these ; tell her, she shines me down :
 An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
 Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck 1220
 O as much fairer—as a faith once fair
 Was richer than these diamonds—hers not mine—
 Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
 Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—
 She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized, 1225

And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,
 Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.
 Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
 Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
 Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain 1230
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across
 Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
 Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
 Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night. 1235

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
 To weep and wail in secret ; and the barge,
 On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
 There two stood arm'd, and kept the door ; to whom,
 All up the marble stair, tier over tier, 1240
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd
 'What is it ?' but that oarsman's haggard face,
 As hard and still as is the face that men
 Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks

On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said, 1245
 'He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,
 Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair !
 Yea, but how pale ! what are they ? flesh and blood ?
 Or come to take the King to Fairyland ?
 For some do hold our Arthur cannot die, 1250
 But that he passes into Fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
 Came girt with knights : then turn'd the tongueless man
 From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
 And pointed to the damsel, and the doors. 1255
 So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
 And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid ;
 And reverently they bore her into hall.
 Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
 And Lancelot later came and mused at her, 1260
 And last the Queen herself, and pitied her :
 But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
 Stoop't, took, brake seal, and read it ; this was all :

'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
 I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat, 1265
 Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
 Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
 I loved you, and my love had no return,
 And therefore my true love has been my death.
 And therefore to our Lady Guinevere, 1270
 And to all other ladies, I make moan :
 Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
 Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
 As thou art a knight peerless.'

Thus he read ;
 And ever in the reading, lords and dames 1275
 Wept, looking often from his face who read
 To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
 So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,
 Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all : 1280
' My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known. 1285
Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love :
To this I call my friends in testimony, 1290
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature : what I could, I did.
I left her and I bade her no farewell ; 1295
Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)
' Ye might at least have done her so much grace, 1300
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death.'
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding,
' Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd ; 1305
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,
More specially were he she wedded poor, 1310
Estate them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance : more than this
I could not ; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, ' O my knight, 1315
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went 1320
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen. 1325
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, ' Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet 1330
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.

And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure !' which was wrought
Thereafter ; but when now the lords and dames 1335
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, ' Lancelot,
Forgive me ; mine was jealousy in love.' 1340
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
' That is love's curse ; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said,

' Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have 1345
Most joy and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by 1350
To win his honour and to make his name,

And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
 Made to be loved ; but now I would to God,
 Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
 Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems, 1355
 By God for thee alone, and from her face,
 If one may judge the living by the dead,
 Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
 Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons 1360
 Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, ' Fair she was, my King,
 Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
 To doubt her fairness were to want an eye, 1365
 To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—
 Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
 Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.'

' Free love, so bound, were freest,' said the King.
 ' Let love be free ; free love is for the best : 1370
 And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
 What should be best, if not so pure a love
 Clothed in so pure a loveliness ? yet thee
 She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,
 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.' 1375

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
 And at the inrunning of a little brook
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
 The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
 And saw the barge that brought her moving down, 1380
 Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
 Low in himself, ' Ah simple heart and sweet,
 Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
 Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul ?
 Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last— 1385
 Farewell, fair lily. " Jealousy in love ? "
 Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride ?

Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
 May not your crescent fear for name and fame
 Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes ? 1390
 Why did the King dwell on my name to me ?
 Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
 Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
 Caught from his mother's arms—the wondrous one
 Who passes thro' the vision of the night— 1395
 She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
 Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
 She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
 As a king's son," and often in her arms
 She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere. 1400
 Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be !
 For what am I ? what profits me my name
 Of greatest knight ? I fought for it, and have it :
 Pleasure to have it, none ; to lose it, pain ;
 Now grown a part of me : but what use in it ? 1405
 To make men worse by making my sin known ?
 Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great ?
 Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
 Not after Arthur's heart ! I needs must break
 These bonds that so defame me : not without 1410
 She wills it : would I, if she will'd it ? nay,
 Who knows ? but if I would not, then may God,
 I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
 To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
 And fling me deep in that forgotten mere, 1415
 Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
 Not knowing he should die a holy man.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
 First made and latest left of all the knights,

Told, when the man was no more than a voice
 In the white winter of his age, to those
 With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

5

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
 Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
 Heard in his tent the moanings of the King :

‘ I found Him in the shining of the stars,
 I mark’d Him in the flowering of His fields,
 But in His ways with men I find Him not.
 I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
 O me ! for why is all around us here
 As if some lesser god had made the world,
 But had not force to shape it as he would,
 Till the High God behold it from beyond,
 And enter it, and make it beautiful ?
 Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
 But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
 And have not power to see it as it is :
 Perchance, because we see not to the close ;—
 For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
 And have but stricken with the sword in vain ;
 And all whereon I lean’d in wife and friend
 Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
 Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
 My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death :
 Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.’

10

15

20

25

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
 There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill’d
 In Lancelot’s war, the ghost of Gawain blown
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
 Went shrilling, ‘ Hollow, hollow all delight !
 Hail, King ! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
 Farewell ! there is an isle of rest for thee.
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.’
 And fainter onward, like wild birds that change

30

35

Their season in the night and wail their way
 From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream 40
 Shrill'd ; but in going mingled with dim cries
 Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
 As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
 When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
 Pass to new lords ; and Arthur woke and call'd, 45
 ' Who spake ? A dream. O light upon the wind,
 Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
 Thine ? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
 Mourn, knowing it will go along with me ? '

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake : 50
 ' O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
 Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field ;
 But in their stead thy name and glory cling
 To all high places like a golden cloud
 For ever : but as yet thou shalt not pass. 55
 Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
 Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man ;
 And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
 I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
 And with him many of thy people, and knights 60
 Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
 Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
 Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
 Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere : 65
 ' Far other is this battle in the west
 Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
 And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
 Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
 And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine 70
 To war against my people and my knights.
 The king who fights his people fights himself.
 And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
 That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
 Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way 75

Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league, 80
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse—
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again ;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast 85
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King ;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven 90
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea : 95
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist, 100
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew ;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle ; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base, 105
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks 110
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;

And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs 115
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore, 120
Save for some whisper of the seething seas.
A dead hush fell ; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide 125
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle : but no man was moving there ;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro 130
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be. 135

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King :

' Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move, 140
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me ?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King. 145
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere : ' My King,
King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,

There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live 150
Who love thee ; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.'

Then spake the King : ' My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house 155
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who swear my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd, 160
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry ;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man : then Modred smote his liege 165
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin ; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd 170
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him, 175
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land :
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full. 180

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
' The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

79

Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
 They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we 185
 Shall never more, at any future time,
 Delight ourselves with talk of knightly deeds,
 Walking about the gardens and the halls
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
 I perish by this people which I made,— 190
 Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
 To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,
 I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
 That without help I cannot last till morn.
 Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur, 195
 Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 Holding the sword—and how I row'd across 200
 And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;
 And, wheresoever I am sung or told
 In aftertime, this also shall be known :
 But now delay not : take Excalibur,
 And fling him far into the middle mere : 205
 Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :
 ' It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
 Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—
 A little thing may harm a wounded man ; 210
 Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
 Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
 And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
 Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men, 215
 Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
 Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
 By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
 Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur, 220
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work 225
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd 230
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ? 235
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale : 240
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as bescem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight :
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere. 245
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time 250
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud : 255

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done? 260
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does. 265
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms, 270
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime 275
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King. 280

Then spake King Arthur, breathing heavily :
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.' 285

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye 290
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,

For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
 In whom should meet the offices of all,
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;
 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl 295
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
 I will arise and slay thee with my hands.' 300

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
 Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
 Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon, 305
 And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
 By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
 So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur : 310
 But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
 And lightly went the other to the King. 315

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :
 ' Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
 Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
 ' Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems 320
 Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
 Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
 Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
 So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ; 325
 But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,

That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard : 330
'My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose, 335
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words ; 340
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed 345
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick !
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd, 350
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right 355
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon. 360

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them ; and descending they were ware

That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these 365
Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes, 370
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

' Then murmur'd Arthur, ' Place me in the barge.'
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all 375
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white 380
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun 385
High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest, 390
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :
' Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ? 395
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led 400

The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
 But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
 Which was an image of the mighty world,
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,
 And the days darken round me, and the years, 405
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :
 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
 And God fulfils himself in many ways,
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. 410
 Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done
 May He within himself make pure ! but thou,
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer 415
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what are men better than sheep or goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer 420
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
 But now farewell. I am going a long way
 With these thou seest—if indeed I go 425
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
 To the island-valley of Avilion ;
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
 Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns 430
 And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, 435
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
 With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere

Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away. 440

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, 'The King is gone.'
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.' 445

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
'He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound 450
He comes again ; but—if he come no more—
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends 455
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ?'

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice 460
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King, 465
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

NOTES

CENONE

The poem is cast in the form of an impassioned prayer by Cenone, the wife of Paris, to 'many-fountained Ida'. She tells how she had been bereft of Paris when he had been called upon to award the golden apple to the most beautiful of the three goddesses who contested the prize. Here, the Queen of Heaven, offered him power and dominion; Pallas the wisdom that came from 'self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control'; and Aphrodite 'the fairest and most loving wife in Greece'. Cenone shut her eyes for fear. When she looked again, Aphrodite had departed with the prize, and Paris to seek his reward, the beautiful Helen, for the love of whom he was to bring upon Troy the evil prophesied at his birth. With one last despairing cry, Cenone went uncomfited down to Troy, there to talk with the prophetess Cassandra, who already had 'the sound of armed men' about the city ringing in her ears.

As in all Tennyson's poems based on Greek legend there is a philosophical significance. Paris judging the goddesses is as a man assessing the values of Life itself, which offers certain gifts—the power that comes from mind and intellect; that finer power which is the wisdom to follow right 'because right is right'; and the seductive charm of the physically beautiful. For Paris to choose the gift of Aphrodite was to bring upon himself and Cenone pain and death and upon Troy the ten years' war; even as for every man it was disaster and shame to exalt the sense above the soul.

1. **Ida**: a mountain range, in Asia Minor, which formed the southern boundary of the Troad, the district belonging to the city of Troy.
2. **Ionian hills**. Ionia was the neighbouring district.
10. **Gargarus**: one of the high peaks of Ida.
11. **takes the morning**: first catches the rising sun.
13. **Troas**: the Troad. Ilion: Troy itself.
15. **Cenone**: daughter of Cebren, a river-god. The nymph had been beloved by

Paris, but he had abandoned her for Helen.

16. **Paris**: the second son of Priam, King of Troy. His mother, Hecuba, had dreamt that he would bring disaster on Troy, and so, to avoid this, he had been cast away as an infant on Mount Ida, where he was found by shepherds and brought up by them to their calling.
18. **in rest**, i.e. even when it was at rest.
22. **many-fountain'd**. Many rivers had their source on

- Ida. Tennyson was fond of using compound epithets.
27. *cicala*: a shrill-chirping insect.
36. *cold crown'd snake*. Snakes are cold-blooded and clammy; some kinds have hoods which somewhat resemble crowns.
- 39-40. *yonder walls, etc.* The Latin poet, Ovid, tells us that the walls of Troy were raised to position by the music of Apollo's lute.
47. *lawn*: glade.
51. *Simois*: one of the rivers rising in Mount Ida.
- 56-7. *like a star fronting the dawn*: as a star grows pale and white at dawn.
60. *foam-bow*. The sunshine on foam gives a rainbow-like effect.
65. *Hesperian gold*. Somewhere in the far West were the wonderful gardens in which grew a tree bearing golden apples. The Hesperides were the sisters who, with the help of an un-sleeping dragon, guarded the golden fruit.
66. *ambrosially*. Ambrosia was the food of the Gods. (Cf. l. 174, where *ambrosial* is used in the sense of 'divinely fair'.)
72. *than whatever Oread haunt*: than any mountain-nymph that haunts.
74. *married brows*: meeting eyebrows, which were much admired by the Greeks and Romans. So much so that—according to Ovid—Roman ladies were not above making them meet artificially by means of a pencil.
- 77-9. *cast upon the board, etc.* The apple of discord had been thrown among all the gods by Eris, the goddess of Strife, who was angry because she had not been invited to the marriage-feast of Peleus.
81. *Iris*: the swift-footed messenger of the gods, who was herself the goddess of the Rainbow.
85. *meed of*: reward for.
94. *the crocus brake like fire*: a very vivid image, which is based not only on the colour, but also on the flame-shaped petals of the crocus.
95. *amaracus*: marjoram, an aromatic herb.
asphodel: a lily with large sweet-scented flowers. It was this kind of lily that was supposed to grow in the Elysian fields—the abode of the blessed after death in Greek mythology. (Cf. *The Lotos-eaters*, l. 170)
96. *lotos*: a kind of lily.
102. *peacock*: the favourite bird of Herè, and sacred to her.
- 105-8. *her, to whom, etc.*: Herè would receive this mark of reverence as Queen of Heaven.
112. *river-sunder'd cham-paign*: open country intersected—and therefore enriched—by many rivers.
113. *labour'd*: i.e., in working.
- 119-23. Power is the aim of all, but only when this power is bred of wisdom does sovereignty come.
- 128-31. Cf. ll. 155-61 in *The Lotos-eaters*.
- 135-40. Pallas Athene, as the goddess of Wisdom, appears 'clear', 'pearly', 'snow-cold', in sharp contrast with the 'rosy', 'warm', 'golden' beauty of Aphrodite, the goddess of Love (ll. 171-4).
137. *O'erthwarted with*: crossed by.
- 142-8. So does Pallas answer

- Here. Mastery over self is greater than mastery over others, and the highest form of wisdom is to live by the greater moral law, following right because it is right and without any regard for the consequences. The passage is typical of Tennyson's high regard for all that is noble and true.
151. *Sequel of guerdon*: the promise of a reward. Pallas scorns to offer a bribe, for no such 'guerdon' would make her appear 'fairer' to the eye: she asks for unbiassed judgment.
155. *fair*: beauty.
162. *Sinew'd with action*: strengthened by use.
- 163-4: i.e. until the fully-developed will, after experiencing all things, becomes a law to itself—the highest law which is one and the same as perfect freedom.
- 170-1. *Idalian . . . Paphian*: Idalium and Paphos were towns in Cyprus sacred to Aphrodite (whom the Romans identified with Venus).
180. *subtle smile*: because she knew that Paris could not resist her seductive gift.
183. *the fairest wife . . . in Greece*: Helen, the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta, was acclaimed as the most beautiful woman in the world.
195. *pard*: leopard. Poets have often credited Beauty with the power of taming wild beasts.
204. The pines were cut down to make ships for Paris's voyage to Sparta.
208. *callow eaglet*: the young eagle, still unfledged.
217. *ruin'd folds*: the hollows spoiled by the cutting down of the pine-trees.
220. *The Abominable*: the goddess of Strife.
- 244-6. *Ænone* seems to have some vague foreboding of the time when Paris, wounded to the death, came to her for the remedy which she alone knew. The story of her refusal, and of her subsequent remorse is told by Tennyson in *The Death of Ænone*.
254. *their . . . laughter*: i.e. of Paris and Helen.
259. *Cassandra*: the daughter of Priam of Troy. She had been given by Apollo the gift of prophecy, but the god had decreed that none should believe her prophecies; hence the epithet 'wild'. She already knows that the evil which Paris had done will end in the fulfilment of the prediction at his birth. The tramp of armed men, which 'rings in her ears', is portentous of the ruin of Troy, after the long horrors of the Trojan

THE LOTOS-EATERS

This poem is based upon a familiar story in the *Odyssey* of Homer. Its five opening stanzas describe how the mariners of Ulysses, sailing home to Ithaca from the Trojan war, come to the island of the Lotos plant. Drugged to inaction by eating the plant, they sing together a Choric Song of the sorrow and pain that come with toil, and the joy they had in that magic languor. The whole poem is heavy with the atmosphere of

sleep, first in the introductory stanzas, Spenserian in form as well as in style, and afterwards in the sweet but weary music of the mariner's song. The picture which Tennyson draws is a fine example of his skill in bringing Nature into harmony with the thoughts and deeds of men, that artifice which Ruskin termed 'pathetic fallacy', in allusion to the convention by which Nature is made to suffer (to be *pathetic* or *sympathetic*) with human life.

The tragedy of the Lotos-eaters was that they turned Life itself into a mockery, for to Tennyson the ease and luxury of the body meant the death of the soul. Time and time again he hurled his protests against the mere avoidance of pain and sorrow. A negative existence he abhorred. 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.'

Like *Erone*, the *Lotos-eaters* appeared first in the 1832 volume, and afterwards, much revised, in the Selections of 1842.

1. he : Ulysses.

8. like a downward smoke. Water falling from a great height makes a fine spray. Note the invariable aptness of Tennyson's similes.

9. Note how effectively the pauses are used, so that the rhythm echoes the sense.

11. veils of thinnest lawn : gauze. The metaphor is a variant on the simile in ll. 8 and 10.

13. slumbrous. Every picture in this description of the land of the Lotos-eaters, makes us *feel* the languid air, and the drowsiness of sleep that was over all.

18. Up-clomb : climbed up.

19. charmed sunset. Even the sun feels the influence of the enchanted air.

21. yellow down : a hill yellow with lotos dust.

23. galingale : a marsh plant, like sedge.

26-7. dark faces . . . Lotos-eaters. Lot s-land was supposed to be on the north coast of Africa. Here lived the people who, through eating the lotos plant, passed their lives in dreamy forgetfulness.

30-3. 'Whoso ate of the honey-sweet fruit would

fain abide there . . . and forget their journey.'—*Odyssey*. The sound of the waves no longer spoke to them of home ; Ithaca had, indeed, become 'an alien shore'.

Choric-Song : sung in chorus by all. The student will note in the dreamy rhythm of the melodious lines the exquisite gift of Tennyson for fitting the sound to the sense.

49. gleaming : owing to the glittering scales of minerals in the granite.

51. tir'd . . . tir'd. Tennyson is fond of this artifice of repetition, which he uses with very great effect. (Cf. l. 95 ; and find other examples in these poems.)

86-7. As death is inevitable, why fill the short time of life with toil ? The very opposite view is expressed in *Ulysses* (ll. 51-2), where the inevitability of death is regarded as an incentive to 'some work of noble note' before the end.

102. amber : the colour of amber ; a clear brownish-yellow.

106. crisping : curling. Tennyson's epithets descriptive of natural objects are always

- based on exact observation.
113. **urn of brass.** The Greeks used to cremate their dead and preserve the ashes.
- 117-19. They had been away for ten years at the siege of Troy. During that time, the changes would be many in 'the little isle' (l. 124) of Ithaca. Their sons meantime would have grown to manhood, and taken their fathers' place.
120. **island princes.** Homer tells us in the *Odyssey* that the princes of the isle were pestering Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, with offers of marriage.
132. **pilot-stars:** the stars which were then the steerman's only guide.
133. **amaranth:** a legendary flower which could never fade.
- moly:** a fabulous herb with white flower and black root, endowed with magical properties. The god Hermes (Mercury) gave it to Ulysses so that he might protect himself against the enchantments of the sorceress Circe.
142. **acanthus-wreath:** the intertwined leaves of this graceful plant.
149. Note the change of metre from the iambic to the trochaic. This change of stress corresponds to a change of mental attitude on the part of the mariners.
152. **wallowing monster:** the whale.
153. **with an equal mind:** unwaveringly.
154. **hollow.** Throughout, Tennyson has pictured the land as one full of caves and valleys.
156. **nectar:** the drink of the gods.

ULYSSES

At the end of the *Odyssey*, the soothsayer Tiresias vaguely prophesies a new voyage of Ulysses. Tennyson caught upon this mere hint of a story and used it as a text for a braver philosophy of life. The ancient Ulysses had returned home, secure at last from peril and toil. And there, reigning over what seemed little more than another Lotos-land, he feels the old spirit stir within him. To 'store and hoard' himself in comfortable ease was a vile thing, when all the time he was 'yearning in desire to follow knowledge'. So he looks out to sea, calls the familiar mariners about him, and bids them sail with him to seek a newer world.

The interpretation is twofold. Tennyson, after the numbness of despair through the death of his friend Hallam, feels again the longing for the adventure of a life which is an eternal striving onward and upward. More than that, the new world towards which Ulysses set his sail was but a symbol of that changing England which was beckoning men on to unknown ways of thought and action. Tennyson looked out upon the uncharted and shifting seas of nineteenth-century science and religion, but he was determined to set out upon the voyage, 'strong in will to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield'.

The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue, and is written in Tennyson's most effective blank verse. Its style marks a second period in the poet's development, when he had

achieved control of his imagery and expression. The artifice remains, not now as a mere clever piece of mechanism, but as an instrument of true poetry.

2. **barren crags:** of Ithaca.
3. **aged wife:** Penelope.
mete and dole: measure and deal out.
4. **unequal:** not uniform in operation. The 'savageneess' of the race made it necessary to rule arbitrarily.
7. **to the lees:** to the dregs, leaving nothing.
10. **the rainy Hyades:** The Hyades ('rain-bringers') were a group of seven stars near the Pleiades. Their rising and setting were supposed to bring rain—'scudding drifts' (driving showers).
17. **ringing:** resounding with the clash of battle.
windy. So does Homer describe Troy.
18. **i.e.** I have myself taken a prominent part in all the experiences of my life.
- 19–20. **i.e.** the unknown merely beckons him on to further and further enterprises.
23. **unburnished:** grown dull through lack of use. Tennyson presents us in these lines (22–32) with a picture of his own mind; for he also scorned comfortable ease and yearned to follow knowledge. Even at eighty he experimented with new subjects, and new forms of verse.
29. **suns:** years.
hoard: shut oneself in (the opposite of 'living dangerously').
- 39–43. There is here the gentle

- scorn of the restless man of action for the patient plodder who is prudent and reliable in 'the sphere of common duties'. Ulysses and his son Telemachus were cast in different moulds.
40. **decent not to fail, etc.:** fittingly mindful, i.e. certain not to fail in his duties as a son.
45. **My mariners.** Homer makes Ulysses return to Ithaca alone. Tennyson, for the purpose of his story, raises the mariners from where they lay 'fathom-deep in ocean', to gather once more round their leader.
48. **opposed:** faced fate with.
49. **free:** clear and steady.
53. **that strove with gods.**
The gods took sides in the Trojan war.
- 60–1. **the baths of all the western stars.** The old notion was that the spheres, which contained the heavenly bodies, revolved round the earth. So, at setting, the stars sank into the western ocean.
63. **Happy Isles:** the 'Fortunate Islands' (in which lay the Elysian fields) vaguely located by the Greeks in the West (perhaps *The Canaries*). To these the favoured of the gods passed without dying.
64. **Achilles:** the greatest of the Greek heroes at the siege of Troy.

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

Tennyson disclaimed any serious connexion between this lyrical romance and the story he treated in *Lancelot and*

Elaine. Here he is seeking rather to clothe an old legend in mystery and magic. There are four distinct pictures: the sunlit harvest fields over which the plaintive song of the Lady floats to the listening reapers; the Lady herself weaving into her magic web the shadows of the world as they appear in her mirror; the coming of Sir Lancelot, and the Lady's defiance of the curse that would fall upon her if she once looked down to Camelot; the death of the Lady in the midst of her song.

Each picture is a pre-Raphaelite painting, exquisite in detail, profuse in imagery, and glowing in colour. Here we see most clearly the effectiveness and abundance of Tennyson's artifice. The vocabulary is rich with the word-painting in which he delights; onomatopoeia and vowel music are cunningly interlinked with the rhythmical changes; consonantal alliteration occurs frequently. Throughout, the mood of Nature harmonizes with the mood of man.

Tennyson has himself explained the symbolism of the poem. 'The new-born love for something, for some one in the wide world from which she had been so long secluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities.' But the interpretation, though it may help to give a unity to the several parts of the poem, tends to shatter the romance. It is a song of shadows.

3. **wold:** plain or open country.

meet the sky: stretch to the horizon.

5. **Camelot.** Many places lay claim to be the site of Arthur's capital—Queen's Camel in Somersetshire, Camelford in Cornwall, Winchester, and others. Tennyson's topography is, however, intentionally vague and visionary, and his picture is merely of 'a city of shadowy palaces'.

9. **Shalott:** clearly a variant of Astolat. The name was taken from an Italian novelle, *Donna di Scalotta*. Tennyson himself says: 'The Lady of Shalott is evidently the Elaine of the *Morte d'Arthur* (of Malory) but I do not think that I had ever heard of the latter when I wrote the former.'

10. **willows whiten:** because the wind turns over their leaves, the under-part of which is white.

aspens: known as 'trembling poplars', because their characteristic is a leaf that quivers.

11. **dusk and shiver:** darken and ripple the surface of the water.

12. **for ever.** The poem suffers in places from faulty rhymes.

17. **imbowers:** shelters within its bowers.

19. **willow-veil'd:** with willows fringing and overshadowing.

22. **shallop:** a light, open boat.

29. **bearded:** with the slender sharp bristles which the botanist calls 'awns'.

31. **clearly.** i.e. whose winding can be distinctly seen.

52. **village-churls:** peasants.

56. **ambling pad:** an easy-paced horse, suitably sedate for its dignified rider.

64. **still:** always and uninterruptedly.

67. **plumes:** feathers on the knights' helmets.

71. This is the key to the poem. During her long seclusion she has tired of 'shadows', and is pining for 'realities'. She has lived in a world of fantasy, until the coming of the dazzling Sir Lancelot blinds her to the consequences of the curse, and her new-born love moves her to defy them.
76. **greaves**: armour for the shins. The picture of Lancelot is vivid and brilliant in colour, in contrast with the shadowy indistinctness of the picture of the Lady in Part II.
80. Does this refer to the device set against its golden background or to the shield shining against the yellow fields of harvest?
82. **gemmy**: studded with jewels.
84. **Galaxy**: the Milky Way.
87. **blazon'd baldric**: a belt (hung from the shoulder to the opposite hip) ornamented with heraldic designs.
98. **bearded meteor**: an apt description of the line of light which a shooting-star makes across the sky; comet-like (for *comet* literally means *long-haired*).
105. i.e. the image of the rider on the bank, and also the image of his reflection in the water.
107. '**Tirra lirra**': imitative of the song of the lark, and expressive of Lancelot's gay light-heartedness.
112. **saw**: for the first time. Her world is at last a world of realities.
- 118-21. Note the change from the brilliant sunshine of Part III to the 'stormy east-wind', the 'waning yellow woods', the moaning stream, and 'the low sky raining'. Does this sympathy of nature constitute a 'pathetic fallacy' here? (See prefatory note to *The Lotos-eaters*.)
129. i.e. seeing a vision of a disaster about to fall upon himself.
165. **royal cheer**: the king's banquet.
- 166-70. While the Knights make the sign of the cross in fear of some evil, Lancelot—all unknowing that he was the innocent cause of her death—sees only her loveliness, and the poem ends simply and beautifully with his prayer for God's mercy on the soul of the unknown.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

The *Idylls of the King* consist of twelve poems based upon various episodes in the life of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The various stories which gathered round the legendary Arthur were collected by Sir Thomas Malory in the 'joyous book' *Morte d' Arthur*, printed by Caxton in 1485, and it was largely to this book that Tennyson was indebted. Briefly told, the legend was that Arthur, the son of Uther Pendragon, had quelled the warring tribes of the west through 'the puissance of his Table Round', that noble company of a hundred and fifty knights sworn to his love and honour. But soon came evil into the company of the Round Table through the guilty love of Lancelot for Arthur's Queen, Guinevere, which spread a moral poison through the Court, and finally broke up that goodly fellowship. After 'the last weird battle

in the west', the dying Arthur was borne away to the unknown, yet always with the hope of coming back to raise up a new kingdom on the sad ruins of the old.

Though the idylls treat of various episodes, they have a unity in the portrayal of the central character of Arthur himself. They are further knit together by a suggestive Nature symbolism: the action follows the march of the seasons of the year, from the Coming of Arthur at the New Year to his Passing at midnight in mid-winter.

That the poems have a symbolical meaning is clear, but Tennyson himself has warned us not to interpret them 'too allegorically'. The unified idea behind the twelve poems is the eternal war of Sense with Soul. In Arthur we find the perfection of goodness in its struggle against evil. He is armed with Excalibur, the Sword of the Spirit: he is upheld by Merlin, the spirit of wisdom and intellect. Against him are Guinevere, the wayward heart of beauty, and Lancelot, courage and honour touched tragically with guilt, behind whom there lurks always in Modred, the dark shadow of traitorous wrong. But, as Tennyson says, the thought behind the image is much more than any one interpretation. 'The whole is the dream of one man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. . . . It is not the history of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle of generations.'

Lancelot and Elaine is the saddest and sweetest of the Idylls. In the cycle of the seasons high summer is on the earth, yet touched with a hint of autumn. For the first time the tragedy of the single sin comes home to Arthur and fills Lancelot with the bitterness of remorse. The two women and the two men stand in strong and vivid contrast. Arthur, who to Guinevere is all fault because he has no fault at all, moves through the story cold, remote, unapproachable. It is Lancelot, his face marked and marred by the battle of the guilty love 'with the love he bare his lord', that arouses our interest and sympathy. On one side is the unholy passion of Guinevere; on the other the pure and hopeless love of Elaine. The 'lily maid' is, perhaps, of all Tennyson's women the most pathetic and finely drawn; no longer the mysterious lady of the shadows in Shalott, but a woman of flesh and blood broken by the pitiful irony of love. Even the minor characters, like Torre, Lavaine, and 'the dumb old servitor', are clearly characterized and significant in this drama of sorrow.

A comparison with the story as told by Malory will show how Tennyson has substituted for the artlessness of the medieval prose the conscious art of poetry. Many a phrase of Malory is to Tennyson the hint of a beauty to be fashioned and developed with his imagery and music into the perfection of his own verse.

. lily: the beauty, delicacy, and purity of the maid are all made manifest by a single word.

Astolat: the same as Shalott. Malory identified

Astolat with Guildford in Surrey, but the description given in this poem of the passage of the barge to London 'upward with the flood' (l. 1147) suggests

- that Tennyson's Astolat had some other location.
4. **sacred**: a solemn trust, made still more sacred by her love.
7. **soilure**: tarnishing.
- 9-10. **devices** . . . in their own tinct: Elaine lovingly embroidered Lancelot's armorial bearings in their proper colours on the silken cover she had made.
- 10-11. **wit** . . . **fantasy**: a fanciful design of her own invention.
19. **dint**: dent.
- 22-3. **Caerlyle** . . . **Caerleon**: Carlisle and Caerleon-upon-Usk (South Wales). Both places have been claimed as Arthur's capital.
27. **lived in fantasy**: dwelt in a world of her own romantic fancies.
35. **Lyonnesse**: the fabled land which had once joined the Scilly Isles to the mainland of Cornwall.
36. **tarn**: a mountain lake.
44. **lichen'd into colour**: covered with rock-moss so that they were of the same colour as the crags.
53. **scaur**: precipitous rock (cf. *Scarborough*).
59. **divinely**: providentially.
62. **nine years**: because the diamonds numbered nine (l. 46).
65. **the heathen**: Saxons and Norsemen.
67. **still**: always.
76. **this world's hugest**: London.
89. **love-loyal**: one of many examples of Tennyson's fondness for initial alliteration in double words.
91. **tale** . . . **destined boon**: the full number, so that he might present them all to the Queen.
94. **lets**: hinders.
95. **The first hint that the King had 'a vague suspicion'** (l. 125) of the secret love of Guinevere and Lancelot. Their love was, however, common gossip at the Court.
106. **myriad cricket**: numberless crickets.
110. **allow'd**: acknowledged.
115. **pledged**: toasted.
118. **devoir**: dutiful devotion.
122. **passionate perfection**: perfect in his passions; indeed, so completely in control of them that he ceases to be human. The saintly purity of his soul renders him 'faultily faultless', and Guinevere wins our sympathy when she asks, 'Who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?'
134. **the low sun**: as opposed to the sun high in the heavens (l. 123), whose pure white light gives no colour to the clouds.
157. **prove**: justify.
163. **lost . . . lost**. The repetition of a word for effect has elsewhere been pointed out as a frequent artifice of Tennyson (see note on *The Lotus-eaters*, l. 51). Sometimes the word is slightly modified, as in ll. 233, 264, *below*.
167. **fired from the west**: lighted up by the setting sun.
193. **blank**: the shields of Arthur's knights were left 'blank and bare' until some noble deed had been performed.
196. **wot**: knows.
197. **plain**: outspoken.
201. **allow**: forgive, excuse.
202. **lustihood**: health and vigour.
203. **joust for . . . and win**: i.e. the ninth diamond. The Lord of Astolat likes

- his little joke (as again in l. 205).
240. i.e. without breaking the rule that beautiful things are for the beautiful.
245. *In battle*: the love for the one conflicting with his love for the other.
247. *on such heights*: i.e. with one so high-born.
252. *yet a living soul*: still alive to the stings of conscience.
263. *as in a smaller time*: in less chivalrous days than those of Arthur.
269. *glanced at*: alluded to.
279. *Badon hill*: a battle in the year 520, which is recognized as historical. The victory of the Britons checked the progress of the West Saxons for some considerable time. The place is identified with Badbury Rings in Dorsetshire.
- 287-300. The list of battles has been taken from Nennius's *History of the Britons*, a ninth-century work. In it he describes how 'the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military powers of Britain, fought against the Saxons. . . . In all these engagements the Britons were successful, for no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty.' It is impossible to fix the location of the battles with any certainty. The suggestions that have been offered are legion (e.g. *Glem*: in Lincolnshire, or Northumberland; *Duglas*: in Lancashire, a river which falls into the estuary of the Ribble; *Bassa*: Bas-hall Brook, a tributary of the Ribble; *Celidon*: in Tweeddale; *Gurnion*: in Stow; *Agned-Carthregon-ton*: Edinburgh, or a hill in Somersetshire; *Trath Treroit*: in Anglesey, or perhaps Solway Firth).
293. *cuirass*: breastplate.
297. *White Horse*: the emblem of the Saxons.
328. i.e. that his tenderness arose from his natural disposition, and that these feelings were, maybe, caused by her presence.
338. *rather*: early.
half-cheated: half-deceiving herself.
354. *rapt*: with enraptured gaze.
356. *favour*: a token of a lady's favour; usually a glove, or other article of dress, worn by a knight in his helmet at the tournaments.
377. *yet-unblazon'd*: no noble deed yet inscribed on it.
382. *squire*: one of whose duties was to bear the knight's shield.
398. *long backs*: undulations, long slopes.
- 406-9. An example of Tennyson's accurate observation of nature. Note, too, the skilful aid of alliteration to secure the true sound effect in ll. 408-9.
411. *broke from underground*: the sun rising from under the earth, as it were.
415. *of the Lake*. There are different aspects of the mythical Lady of the Lake. Tennyson's Lady of the Lake has a spiritual and mystic character which has nothing in common with Vivien, that Lady of the Lake who, in the old French romances, had stolen Lancelot in his infancy and brought him up in her lake home. (See ll. 1393-1400.)
422. *Pendragon*: the chief dragon, or leader. It was

- Uther, Arthur's father, who had first received this title, and had adopted a golden dragon (still the emblem of the Welsh) as his device.
423. **mysteriously.** There were mysteries about the 'coming' of Arthur, and many mysterious prophesyings about his 'passing'.
429. A good example of Tennyson's consummate genius for vivid simile. The rainbow effect is, of course, produced by the many-coloured dresses of the ladies.
431. **samite:** fabric of silk, interwoven with gold.
440. **with all ease.** A tribute to the skilful design of the carving, and the delicacy of the workmanship.
446. **crescent:** growing, coming to his full power.
453. Attackers and defenders.
456. Note how Tennyson breaks the usual rhythm of blank verse in order to secure an effect of suddenness by his stress on 'Shock', followed by a slight pause.
457. **left afield:** remained at his work in the fields.
470. **versatility:** all-round skill.
- 474-5. Note the alliteration, and the close echo of 'fury' in 'fiery'.
477. **couch'd:** lowered to the position of attack.
- prick'd:** spurred.
- 480-4 Another nature-picture, drawn with the eye on the object.
489. **worshipfully:** nobly, worthy of honour.
494. **lustily holpen:** strongly helped.
498. **barrier:** the palisade round the arena.
525. **marches:** border lands.
535. **Gawain:** the son of Lot, King of Orkney, and Morgause, Arthur's sister. His brother was Gareth, and his half-brother the traitor Modred. Gawain's character deteriorates in the *Idylls*. Once surnamed 'The Courteous', he becomes disloyal (l. 557), and treacherous (l. 635). Killed in the war against Lancelot, his ghost discovers that loyalty is greater than the delights he had placed above duty—'Hollow, hollow, all delight'. (See *The Passing of Arthur*, l. 30, and note.)
548. **restless:** glittering, throbbing.
552. **i.e. in the flower of his strength.**
554. **Tristram:** the knight who is the central figure in the *Idyll*, *The Last Tournament*.
- Geraint:** a prince of Devon, whose story is told in *Geraint and Enid*.
556. **the child of Lot:** King Lot had been a traitor, but Gareth had inherited none of his disloyalty. Of the three brothers, Gareth alone remained 'a true knight'.
591. **fantastical:** fanciful.
592. **so fine a fear:** such a delicate scruple.
- 605, etc. The love of Guinevere shows itself in this wild outburst of jealous rage, and is in marked contrast with the deep, abiding love of Elaine, whose only thought is for her wounded loved one (l. 620).
643. **from a height:** as one moving in a more exalted sphere.
653. **lost the hern:** missed the heron.
660. **ramp:** rampant, i.e. standing on hind-legs.

- field:** the heraldic term for the surface of a shield, forming the background for the armorial bearings.
- 667. Full simple.** This child-like avowal is quite in keeping with Elaine's simplicity.
- 683. like enow:** likely enough.
- 695. the courtesies of the court.** These had now degenerated so much that amidst the easier manners of the Court Gawain might hope for greater intimacy with Elaine. Guinevere's infidelity had spread corruption through the 'Table Round'.
- 707. i.e. regarding courtesy as greater than obedience.**
- 715. strokes of the blood:** beats of the heart.
- 728. i.e. gave no sign of agitation, and so spoiled the effect the old gossip expected—and hoped—to produce.**
- 764. tokens:** favours (l. 356).
- 787. curvet.** A horse is said to curvet when it raises its fore-legs, and then, as these are descending, raises its hind-legs also.
- 788. a field of flowers.** Tennyson thus gives an indication that this was an Idyll of Summer. Elsewhere he writes 'Full-summer' (l. 1134) and 'casement standing wide for heat' (l. 1226).
- 96. The deeds of Arthur's wars** were represented by symbols which had an allegorical meaning.
- 807. battle-writhen:** twisted by the wielding of weapons.
- 825. Note how simply Tennyson gains his effects here.**
- 851. forbore him:** bore with him patiently.
- 857. simples:** herbs used as medicines.
- 859. her simple blush:** by which she had revealed her love (ll. 831-2).
- 870. straiten'd:** restrained him as with fetters.
- 871-2. English poetry has no finer example of oxymoron, a figure of speech which arrests attention by bringing together seeming contradictions. Lancelot could be faithful to Guinevere only by being faithless to Arthur.**
- 877. one face:** that of Guinevere, whose 'bright image' is the 'ghostly grace' of l. 880.
- 883. rough sickness:** his discourtesy in his periods of delirium (ll. 849-50).
- 898. burthen:** burden, refrain repeated after each verse of a song.
- 905. victim's flowers:** the garlands with which the victim was decorated in ancient sacrifices. The idea of her death was ever with Elaine, and from this point it becomes more and more insistent.
- 923. that I live . . . is yours:** i.e. his life had been saved through her care.
- 929. Malory quaintly explains Lancelot's unwillingness to wed. 'For if I were, then should I be bound to tarry with my wife, and leave armes and turnaments, battells and adventures.'**
- 939. quit:** requite.
- 953. my realm.** His hereditary kingdom was Ben-wicke, which is usually thought to have been in Brittany.
- 969. against me:** against my nature and inclination.
- 995. sallow-rifted glooms:** the dusk of evening, broken by shafts of sickly yellow light.
- 999. make:** used here in its

- early sense of composing poetry.
1000. The song is delicate and sweet. Tennyson could write a simple language just as skilfully as he could fashion the highly ornate verse with which he has made us more familiar.
1015. the Phantom. Cf. the banshee of Ireland, the water-wraith of Scotland, and other apparitions that give warning of approaching death.
1026. still: silent.
1072. break the passion: cure her of her love.
1092. ghostly man: the priest who was to 'shrive' her (i.e. hear her confession and give her absolution).
1124. rather in the fantasy: merely in her own imagination.
1129. dole: grief. Note how their grief is starkly told by these few monosyllables.
1135. Pall'd: shrouded.
1138. Winking: twitching.
- 1167-8. The Queen is not completely able to conceal her emotion: the lace trembles on her heaving breast.
1170. oriel: windowed recess.
- 1177-8. As the dusky plumage of the cygnet (or young swan) is dark compared with that of the swan, so is the whiteness of the swan's neck dark in comparison with Guinevere's.
- 1187-9. Tennyson's fondness for word-play almost obscures the meaning here. Lancelot believes that the Queen's nobility of heart and her trust in him would prevent her from accepting the rumours of his infidelity to her.
1210. apart, i.e. away from Guinevere's sight.
1212. graceful: courteous.
1225. The Queen's impetuous action is in dramatic contrast with her previous self-possession.
- 1228-9. i.e. the drops of water gleamed like the diamonds.
- 1230-5. A most significant picture. As Lancelot stands between the two women who loved him so differently, we are acutely aware of the tragedy of it all. 'At the window above Guinevere, the sinful agent; below, spotless Elaine, in the calm repose and death of sacred affection.'
1253. girt with: surrounded by.
- 1256-7. Sir Percivale . . . Sir Galahad. Percivale, 'the saintly youth', and Galahad, the type of stainless purity, were fitting bearers for the lily maid.
- 1264-74. Tennyson has copied Malory closely in this letter.
1265. sometime: formerly.
1299. Guinevere's passionate anger was past, but—like the sea—she does not regain her calm immediately the storm is over.
1316. worship: honour.
1319. that shrine: Westminster.
1327. half-forgotten kings. Westminster Abbey is built on the site of earlier buildings, so that it is faintly possible to conceive of the 'dust of kings' lying there, even though these kings were 'half-forgotten' in the days of Arthur.
1346. affiance: trust.
- 1402-16. Faced with his own disloyalty to King Arthur's ideal, Lancelot is heavy with remorse. Yet even at this moment he is conscious of his human weakness; he has not the strength to break the bonds.

1415. forgotten mere: the lake of his foster-mother, 'where'er it be' (l. 1401).
 1418. a holy man. Malory tells us that after the Queen

had retired to the convent of Almesbury, Lancelot turned monk, and died at last 'in the odour of sanctity'.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

In the 1842 volume had appeared *Morte d'Arthur*, which Tennyson afterwards developed and used as this final poem of the *Idylls*. Here we have the story of the inevitable end. The cycle of the seasons has run its course to mid-winter. In the last battle Arthur lies wounded, alone save for Sir Bedivere. The King, whose very perfection throughout the poems tends to weary us as it wearied Guinevere, has become human and pathetic. Lying there beside 'a broken chancel and a broken cross', he bids Sir Bedivere cast away Excalibur, the mystic symbol of the spiritual power within his soul; and with the ocean of his life behind him he voyages out, on 'the great water' to another land of hope and renewal.

The poem is rich with some of Tennyson's finest imagery and music.

1. Sir Bedivere: 'the first of all his knights knighted by Arthur at his crowning.' In the allegory he is a symbol of friendship and sympathy.

- 12-28. It is a human rather than an allegorical King Arthur whom we see here broken-hearted by the infidelity of Guinevere and of Lancelot. In this moment of despair, the whole of his life work appears to have been in vain, for now his realm 'reels back into the beast' once more. The note of failure soon changes, however, into one of renewed hope (l. 28).

- 30-1. Gawain kill'd in Lancelot's war. When Lancelot's illicit love-affair with Guinevere was fully known, he retired to Benwick (Brittany), 'his realm beyond the seas', whither Arthur followed to make war upon

him. In this war Gawain fell, according to the prophecy that Lancelot would slay the man that he loved best.

35. isle of rest: the island-valley of Avilion spoken of in l. 427.

52. Elves . . . glamour: the traditions and legends associated with the name of Arthur, as opposed to the certain and fadeless glory of his name and fame.

56. Light was Gawain. The earlier Arthurian poems and romances regarded Gawain as the model of chivalry, but Malory (whose narrative Tennyson followed closely) pictured him as light-hearted and unreliable.

59. Modred: Arthur's nephew, who was left as regent during the King's absence, and who treacherously raised a revolt. The King, on his return,

- drew up his army against the rebel, and in the 'dim, weird battle of the west' Modred was slain, and Arthur received his death-wound. As a figure in the allegory, Modred represents the brute forces which are at war against righteousness.
64. Bedivere performs the office of true friendship. The idealist too often indulges in brooding, and it is from such a mood of introspection that Bedivere rouses King Arthur to action.
68. petty kings : of Britain. fought with Rome. *The Coming of Arthur* describes Rome as 'the slowly-fading mistress of the world', grown too weak and old to drive the heathen (i.e. the Picts and Scots) from the Roman wall. But though her legions had been withdrawn from Britain many years before, she still claimed tribute on occasion—a tribute which King Arthur scorned to pay.
77. lying in the dust at Almesbury. Guinevere had taken refuge in a nunnery at Almesbury (variously identified as Amesbury, near Stonehenge, and Almondsbury, in Gloucestershire). When Arthur came to bid farewell to her, 'prone from off her seat she fell, And grovelling with her face against the floor' (*Guinevere*).
81. the sunset bound of Lyonesse : the western limits of that fabled land—'a land of old upheaven from the abyss.' (See *Lancelot and Elaine*, l. 35.)
- 90-1. the great light of heaven . . . at his lowest : the time of the winter solstice. With the passing of Arthur, the year also passes—the old order changeth'.
94. the last dim . . . battle. 'The ideal soul of man', represented by Arthur in the allegory is here in its struggle with Death.
- 107-17. Tennyson's artistry in words is admirably illustrated by this magnificent pen-picture of the rush of the tumult. His skill in obtaining onomatopoeic effects, with sound and sense in perfect accord, is particularly seen in ll. 108-10, in which the frequent sibilants give us the complete clash of arms. The lines move as quickly as the conflict they picture.
109. brands : swords.
135. the voice . . . days to be : the sound of the everlasting sea.
- 151-2. he that brought the heathen back : Modred made a league with the Saxons, 'and tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse, heathen, the brood by Hengist left' (*Guinevere*).
158. The reference is to Lancelot.
168. Excalibur : 'cut-steel' ; the huge cross-hilted sword, wrought for Arthur by the Lady of the Lake (cf. ll. 197-201, and 271-4). So does Tennyson typify the Church, equipping her champion with the Sword of the Spirit.
- 177-80. The scenery is symbolical. The lofty purpose of Arthur's life was—like the chancel and the cross—broken, and he lies now on the narrow borderland between the waters of Life and Eternity.

182. **sequel**: cf. consequence.
unsolders: breaks up.
191. **Merlin**: the great enchanter at the Court of Arthur's father. He had prophesied that Arthur would never die, but would 'pass, again to come'. As a figure in the allegory he represents intellectual power and the march of science.
197. **an arm**: the arm of the Lady of the Lake.
199. **samite**: rich silk, interwoven with gold threads.
205. **the middle mere**: the middle of the lake.
206. **lightly**: nimbly, quickly.
- 216-9. Another of the many examples of Tennyson's gift for making the sound fit the sense. Note how the short vowels and sharp consonants of l. 218 contrast with the long vowels and liquid letters of l. 219.
225. **Myriads**: an indefinitely great number.
topaz: a precious stone which has a variety of colours.
jacinth: the hyacinth, a gem reddish - orange in colour.
226. **subtlest**: most skilfully wrought.
231. **many-knotted waterflags**: the many-jointed reeds that waved on the edge ('marge') of the water.
- 238-9. A fine onomatopoeic effect.
248. **lief**: beloved. Tennyson frequently used words which were not in common use. His purpose in thus using archaisms was to give an old-world atmosphere to these tales of long ago.
252. **counting the dewy pebbles**. When the mind is deeply occupied, the senses will often take notice of the most trifling things.
254. **curiously**: skilfully.
chased: set with jewels, inlaid.
278. **conceit**: notion, idea. Bedivere's false notion prevents him from seeing clearly what his true duty was.
290. **widow'd of the power, etc.**: bereft of the commanding glance that compels obedience.
293. **offices**: duties. The last ('latest-left') of the knights should combine within himself all the knightly qualities.
300. Tennyson usually represents Arthur as a being so perfect that he becomes colourless. The sharp anger of this line gives him a welcome human touch.
307. **northern morn**: Aurora Borealis.
308. **moving isles of winter**: floating icebergs.
shock: collide.
311. **dipt**: went below. The Lady of the Lake receives the sword back into her keeping that it may equip the King in other regions; the life of the soul does not end when it passes from this earth.
316. **drawing thicker breath**: breathing more heavily.
335. **pavement**: the floor of the chapel.
338. **As in a picture**: i.e. with set, fixed, gaze.
339. **remorsefully**: compassionately; full of *pity*, rather than *remorse* in the modern sense. (So did Shakespeare use the word.)
350. **Clothed with his breath**. Tennyson, by many a skilful touch such as this, completes the picture of the icy winter.
354. **harness**: armour.
- 354-60. Tennyson's melody

- of diction is admirably illustrated here. Note his alliteration, and the onomatopoeic effects produced by the harsh consonants, changing to the soft liquid sounds, and the use of the vowel *a*, giving place to the melodious *o*.
- 358. dint of armed heels:** the tread of iron-shod feet.
- 365. Black-stoled:** black-robed.
- 366. Three Queens.** These queens had attended upon Arthur at his coronation. When Tennyson was asked if they represented Faith, Hope, and Charity, he replied, 'They mean that and they do not. . . . They are also three Graces, but they are much more.'
- 367. tingling:** trembling in response.
- 378. complaining:** lamenting.
- 381-2. wither'd moon . . . springing east:** the moon paling at the rising of the sun.
- 383. greaves and cuisses:** armour for the shins and for the thighs.
- 383-4. drops of onset:** blood from the fight.
- 388.** Tennyson, on occasion, wrote lines which have little or no poetic merit.
- 392. shot.** The figure is that of a meteor.
- 401. The holy Elders:** the 'wise men' from the East, who followed the star to the birthplace of Christ.
- 410. one good custom:** the order of chivalry.
- 427. Avilion.** The allegorical Arthur—the ideal soul of man passing to some immortal realm—for the moment gives place here to the Arthur of Celtic legend passing to the 'island of the blest'. (The valley is sometimes identified with that in which Glastonbury stands.)
- 431. crown'd:** encircled.
- 435. fluting a wild carol.** The belief that swans sing beautifully a little before their death is preserved in the word 'swan-song'.
- 437. swarthy webs:** dark webbed feet.
- 445.** The prophecy of Merlin.
- 446. clomb:** climbed. (Cf. note on l. 248.)
- 469.** The poem ends on a full note of hope. The soul is immortal. Arthur has passed to be acclaimed as a triumphant king returning from his wars. He 'vanishes into light', and the ideal for which he strove will live on. A new era begins with the rising of the sun upon the New Year.

SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS

1. 'True art is to conceal art.' Apply this dictum to the poetry of Tennyson.
2. The aptness and picturesqueness of Tennyson's similes, with illustrative quotation.
3. The artifices that Tennyson adopts to vary the regular pentameter of his blank verse.
4. 'All the charm of all the Muses
flowering in a *lonely* word.'
Tennyson writes thus of Virgil. Show how he himself had the same power of giving a complete picture in a single word.
5. 'No other English poet has set before us so exactly the essential features of a landscape.' Discuss this with reference to one or more pictures of natural scenery.
6. 'There are myriad lines in Tennyson which are a delight to the ears merely through the arrangement of the vowels and consonants.' Illustrate.
7. *The Passing of Arthur* is purposely archaic in diction. Discuss.
8. Tennyson has been accused of weak characterization, especially in the *Idylls*. Comment on this, with reference to *Lancelot and Elaine* and *The Passing of Arthur*.
9. Contrast the portraits of Lancelot and Arthur, and of Guinevere and Elaine.
10. Tennyson's debt to Malory.
11. *The Lady of Shalott* is spoilt by defects in rhyme. Discuss and illustrate.
12. A contrast between *The Lotos-eaters* and *Ulysses* in theme and style.
13. The *Quarterly Review* said that the repetition in *Ænone* spoilt the poem. Discuss this criticism.
14. *The Lotos-eaters* is heavy with sleep. With what words and phrases does Tennyson obtain this effect?
15. 'Tennyson was a lord of language rioting in gorgeous descriptions.' Discuss.
16. It is said that poetry should add not only to men's knowledge but also to their happiness. How far has Tennyson succeeded in doing this?
17. Why does Tennyson occupy a sure place in the hearts of 'ordinary' men and women?

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